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TOWARDS
NON-VIOLENT SOCIALISM

495
22 MAR 1956

M. K. GANDHI

G. Vol. 4

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In the Press

A Gandhi Anthology
"Unto This Last"

TOWARDS
NON-VIOLENT SOCIALISM

OF THE PRINCIPAL, GRA...
495
22 MAR 1956
ADUTURAI
CENTRE

BY

M. K. GANDHI

Edited by
BHARATAN KUMARAPPA

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Gandhiji dreamt of an India in which people would enjoy the greatest amount of freedom, and live on the principle of each for all and all for each, and where production would be according to the capacity of the individual and distribution according to his need.

Obviously, such a goal is realizable only where individuals are not driven against their will but are bound to each other by cords of love like members of a family. Anything therefore that divides, or sets up one individual against his neighbour is inimical to the realization of this goal.

Accordingly, Gandhiji was convinced that the only way of striving towards this goal was to do everything possible to cement and bring together elements in society which are tending to pull apart. If we want love and peace we cannot have it by preaching hatred and strife, just as if we want water cooled we cannot have it by placing it over fire. As the end so the means. Since the Socialist goal is one of love or non-violence it can be brought about only by non-violent means.

Besides, the goal being one where the individual is bound by moral obligation and love to his neighbour, the community in which the individual lives his daily life should be a small well-knit one. In large groups like, for instance, cities, there can be very little corporate feeling, individuals live to themselves, life is impersonal, and a man's dealings with his neighbours is determined by legal contracts rather than by a sense of mutual moral obligation. Gandhiji saw that a community life such as the Socialist desired, where individuals will live for each other, will be possible only in villages which were organized on the basis of mutual dependence, each producing for the primary needs of his neighbours. The economic life of the

community would thus be based on peasant agriculture and handicrafts, not on mechanized farming and factories.

In such a Socialist economy the individual would have to learn to curb his acquisitive instincts and desire for his own private advancement, unlike today when greed and self-indulgence are the basic motives of economic life. Gandhiji therefore advocated the ideals of love, non-possession, and *brahmacharya* or self-control. As a matter of fact, all the eleven Ashram vows which he propounded are essential to the establishment of a non-violent society. These are truth, love, *brahmacharya*, non-possession, non-stealing, bread-labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equality of religions, anti-untouchability and *swadeshi*. An account of these will be found in *From Yeravda Mandir*, published by the Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. Owing to limitation of space, we have included here only Gandhiji's discourses on non-possession and bread-labour.

Being a practical idealist, as he often called himself, Gandhiji did not dwell in a dream-world of his own in regard to non-violent Socialism, nor did he even attempt to depict in detail his Utopia, but concerned himself almost exclusively with solving present-day problems in the light of his goal.

What, for example, was he as a non-violent Socialist to do in regard to conflict between capital and labour, or between landlord and peasant ? What place in non-violent socialism would he give to large-scale industry as against cottage industries ? These are practical problems with which Gandhiji grappled.

Much of our confusion and doubleness of mind is due to the fact that we do not have the clear vision which Gandhiji had of the India he wanted to evolve. If we approve of his goal then it would seem that there is no way of reaching it except by the way he so clearly pointed out during the last 30 years. Other great teachers only laid down principles ; but the value of Gandhiji is that he showed by example how in the light of these principles he would tackle the problems confronting us today. He thus

reduced the ideal to the terms of the actual. It is our fault if, in spite of such clear guidance, we choose to go our own way and flounder. It is because these problems are pressing us on all sides and demand far-sighted solutions that it is necessary for us to have before us Gandhiji's way of dealing with them, in his own words.

We have given besides Gandhiji's own articles, reports and accounts by others of his speeches and interviews. The titles are his for the most part.

Bombay, BHARATAN KUMARAPPA
July, 1951

NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH THEIR MEANINGS

Ahimsa — non-violence ; love

Ashram — a place of spiritual retirement ; Gandhiji's colony run on a spiritual basis

Avatar — incarnation

Bhajan — prayer in song-form

Bhangi — scavenger, classed as 'untouchable'

Brahmacharya — celibacy ; self-control

Chamar — leather-worker, classed as 'untouchable'

Chapati — flat unleavened bread

Chaprasi — peon ; office boy

Charkha — spinning wheel

Coolie — wage-earner

Dewan — prime minister of a princely State

Dharmashala — free rest-house for travellers

Dhed — an 'untouchable' caste

Duragraha — clinging to evil

Fakir — wandering ascetic

Ghee — clarified butter

Goondaism — terrorism ; lawlessness

Gur — brown product from sweet palm or sugar-cane juice, used as sugar

Harijan — lit. people of God, a term used by Gandhiji for 'untouchables'

Hartal — temporary suspension of work or business

Kabuli — Pathan money-lender

Karmayogi — one who seeks to attain salvation through action

Khadi (khaddar) — hand-spun hand-woven cloth

Kisan — peasant

Kshatriya — the warrior caste

Lakh — one hundred thousand (100,000)

Lathi — long wooden or bamboo stick

Lota — small metal pot
Lungoti — under-garment around the waist, loin-cloth
Mahajan — a money-lender
Musafarkhana — free rest-house for travellers
Namaz — Muslim daily prayers
Panchayat — a village council
Pariah — outcaste
Purna — complete, full
Raj — rule
Rakshasa — evil spirit ; devil
Rickshaw — two-wheeled vehicle for passengers, drawn by men
Rishi — seer
Roti — flat unleavened bread
Ryot — peasant
Sabha — organization, meeting
Sadavrat — place where alms or food is distributed free to the poor daily
Sari — a cloth worn as garment by women
Satyagraha — lit. clinging to Truth or soul-force ; non-violent resistance
Savarna — of non-untouchable caste ; belonging to one of the upper three castes
Swadeshi — loyalty or obligation to one's immediate neighbourhood ; of local manufacture
Swaraj — self-government
Taluka — sub-division of a district
Talukdar — administrative officer in charge of a taluka
Tapas — penance
Tehsil — an administrative unit
Vaid — doctor of indigenous medicine
Vakil — lawyer
Varna — caste
Varnashram — the system of the four castes and four stages in life
Zamindar — landlord

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TOWARDS NON-VIOLENT SOCIALISM

SECTION ONE : THE GOAL

1

OUR FUTURE FROM OUR PAST

We notice that the mind is a restless bird ; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times, and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade, and charged a regulation wage. It is not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them, and that poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were, therefore, satisfied with small villages. They saw that kings and their swords were

inferior to the sword of ethics and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the *rishis* and the *fakirs*. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from them. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior ; moreover, these *vakils* and *vaids* did not rob people ; they were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil, too, was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule.

Hind Swaraj, chap. XIII (1908)

2

INDEPENDENCE

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or *panchayat* having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour.

This society must naturally be based on truth and non-violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God meaning a self-existent, all-knowing living Force which inheres every other force known to the world, and which depends on none and

which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living Light.

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening never-ascending circle. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it. If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last.

In this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest wind cannot move it.

In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place. But I must confess that I have never sat down to think out what that machine can be. I have

thought of Singer's sewing machine. But even that is perfunctory. I do not need it to fill in my picture.

Panchgani, 21-7-'46

Harijan, 28-7-'46

3

MISLEADING

Readers have besieged me with leaflets which the Propaganda Committee of W. I. N. * Liberal Association has been distributing broadcast.

Leaflet No. 6 contains the following:

> "What would India be like when Gandhi-Raj comes?
>
> No Railways. No Hospitals. No Machinery.
>
> No army and navy will be wanted, because Gandhi will assure other nations that India would not interfere with them, and so they will not interfere with India!
>
> No laws necessary, no courts necessary, because every one will be law unto himself. Everybody will be free to do what he likes. It will be a very easy life because everybody will have to go about in a *khaddar lungoti* and sleep in the open."

I cannot say this is an exaggeration. It is a clever caricature permissible in Western warfare. It is only suggestively false. Let me say what I mean. In the first instance, India is not striving to establish "Gandhi-Raj". It is in dead earnest to establish *Swaraj* and would gladly and legitimately sacrifice Gandhi for the sake of winning *Swaraj*. "Gandhi-Raj" is an ideal condition and in that condition all the five negatives will represent a true picture, but under *Swaraj* nobody ever dreams, certainly I do not dream, of no railways, no hospitals, no machinery, no army and navy, no laws and law courts. On the contrary, there will be railways, only they will not be intended for the military or the economic exploitation of India, but they will be used for promoting internal trade and will make the lives of third class passengers fairly comfortable. There will be some return for the fares the third class

* Western India National.

public pay. Nobody anticipates complete absence of disease during *Swaraj*; there will therefore certainly be hospitals, but one hopes that the hospitals will then be intended more for those who suffer from accidents than from self-indulgence. Machinery there certainly will be in the shape of the spinning wheel, which is after all a delicate piece of machinery, but I have no doubt that several factories will grow up in India under *Swaraj* intended for the benefit of the people, not as now for draining the masses dry. I do not know of the navy but I do know that the army of India of the future will not consist of hirelings to be utilized for keeping India under subjection and for depriving other nations of their liberty, but it would be largely cut down, will consist largely of volunteers and will be utilized for policing India. There will be laws and Law Courts under *Swaraj*, but they will be custodians of the people's liberty, not, as they now are, instruments in the hands of a bureaucracy which has emasculated and is intent upon further emasculating a whole nation. Lastly, whilst it will be optional for anybody who chooses to go about in a *lungoti* and sleep in the open, let me hope that it will not be necessary as it is today for millions to go about with a dirty rag which serves for a *lungoti* for want of the means to buy sufficient clothing, and to rest their weary and starved bodies in the open for want of a roof. It is not right therefore to tear some ideas expressed in *Hind Swaraj* from their proper setting, caricature them and put them before the public as if I was preaching these ideas for anybody's acceptance.

Young India, 9-3-'22

4

POOR MAN'S SWARAJ *

You have in your statement rightly said that the *Swaraj* of my dream is the poor man's *Swaraj*. The necessaries of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by the princes and moneyed men. But that does not mean that you should have palaces like theirs. They are not necessary for happiness. You or I would be lost in them. But you ought to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys. I have not the slightest doubt that *Swaraj* is not *purna Swaraj* until these amenities are guaranteed to you under it. I do not know when we will win it but we have all to strive for it.

Young India, 26-3-'31

* From a speech delivered in reply to a reception given by the Labour Union of Ahmedabad.

SECTION TWO: MORAL REQUISITES

5

WHO IS A SOCIALIST?

Socialism is a beautiful word, and so far as I am aware, in socialism all the members of society are equal — none low, none high. In the individual body the head is not high because it is the top of the body, nor are the soles of the feet low because they touch the earth. Even as members of the individual body are equal, so are the members of society. This is socialism.

In it the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee are all on the same level. In terms of religion there is no duality in socialism. It is all unity. Looking at society all the world over, there is nothing but duality or plurality. Unity is conspicuous by its absence. This man is high, that one is low, that is a Hindu, that a Muslim, the third a Christian, the fourth a Parsi, the fifth a Sikh, the sixth a Jew. Even among these there are subdivisions. In the unity of my conception there is perfect unity in the plurality of designs.

In order to reach this state we may not look on things philosophically and say that we need not make a move until all are converted to socialism. Without changing our life we may go on giving addresses, forming parties and hawk-like seize the game when it comes our way. This is no socialism. The more we treat it as game to be seized, the farther it must recede from us.

Socialism begins with the first convert. If there is one such, you can add zeros to the one and the first zero will account for ten and every addition will account for ten times the previous number. If, however, the beginner is a zero, in other words, no one makes the beginning,

multiplicity of zeros will also produce zero value. Time and paper occupied in writing zeroes will be so much waste.

This socialism is as pure as crystal. It, therefore, requires crystal-like means to achieve it. Impure means result in an impure end. Hence the prince and the peasant will not be equalized by cutting off the prince's head, nor can the process of cutting off equalize the employer and the employed. One cannot reach truth by untruthfulness. Truthful conduct alone can reach truth. Are not non-violence and truth twins ? The answer is an emphatic 'no'. Non-violence is embedded in truth and vice versa. Hence has it been said that they are faces of the same coin. Either is inseparable from the other. Read the coin either way. The spelling of words will be different. The value is the same. This blessed state is unattainable without perfect purity. Harbour impurity of mind or body and you have untruth and violence in you.

Therefore, only truthful, non-violent and pure-hearted socialists will be able to establish a socialistic society in India and the world. To my knowledge there is no country in the world which is purely socialistic. Without the means described above the existence of such a society is impossible.

New Delhi, 6-7-'47

Harijan, 13-7-'47

6

TRUTH, NON-VIOLENCE AND FAITH IN GOD ESSENTIAL

Truth and *ahimsa* must incarnate in socialism. In order that they can, the votary must have a living faith in God. Mere mechanical adherence to truth and *ahimsa* is likely to break down at the critical moment. Hence have I said that Truth is God. This God is a living Force. Our life is of that Force. That Force resides in, but is not the body. He who denies the existence of that great Force, denies to himself the use of that inexhaustible Power and thus remains impotent. He is like a rudderless ship which, tossed about here and there, perishes without making any headway.

The fact is that it has always been a matter of strenuous research to know this great Force and its hidden possibilities.

My claim is that in the pursuit of that search lies the discovery of Satyagraha. It is not, however, claimed that all the laws of Satyagraha have been laid down or found. This I do say, fearlessly and firmly, that every worthy object can be achieved by the use of Satyagraha. It is the highest and infallible means, the greatest force. Socialism will not be reached by any other means. Satyagraha can rid society of all evils, political, economic and moral.

New Delhi, 13-7-'47

Harijan, 20-7-'47

7

NON-POSSESSION OR POVERTY

Non-possession is allied to non-stealing. A thing, not originally stolen, must nevertheless be classified as stolen property, if we possess it without needing it. Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the law of Love cannot hold anything against tomorrow. God never stores for the morrow; He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who have lived in such faith, have always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man from day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attendant upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted; while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. Perfect fulfilment of the ideal of non-possession requires, that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only the fewest possible, if any at all, can reach this ideal. We ordinary seekers may not be repelled by the seeming

impossibility. But we must keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service. Judging by this criterion, we find, that in the Ashram we possess many things, the necessity for which cannot be proved, and we thus tempt our neighbours to thieve.

From the standpoint of pure Truth, the body too is a possession. It has been truly said, that desire for enjoyment creates bodies for the soul. When this desire vanishes, there remains no further need for the body, and man is free from the vicious cycle of births and deaths. The soul is omnipresent ; why should she care to be confined within the cagelike body, or do evil and even kill for the sake of that cage ? We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purposes of service so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes with us the staff of life. We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness, and the beatific vision in the fulness of time. Let us all examine ourselves from this standpoint.

We should remember, that non-possession is a principle applicable to thoughts, as well as to things. A man who fills his brain with useless knowledge violates that inestimable principle. Thoughts, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way. In this connection we may consider the definition of knowledge contained in the 13th chapter of the *Gita*. We are there told, that humility (*amanitvam*) etc. constitute knowledge, and all the rest is ignorance. If this is true, — and there is no doubt that it is true, — much that we hug today as knowledge is ignorance pure and simple, and therefore only does us harm, instead of conferring any benefit. It makes the mind wander, and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in

endless ramifications of evil. Needless to say, this is not a plea for inertia. Every moment of our life should be filled with mental or physical activity, but that activity should be *sattvika*, tending to Truth. One who has consecrated his life to service cannot be idle for a single moment. But we have to learn to distinguish between good activity and evil activity. This discernment goes naturally with a single-minded devotion to service.

Yeravda Mandir, 1930

From Yeravda Mandir, chap. VI

8

IS NOT SERVICE WORSHIP ?

Q. Would it not be better for a man to give the time he spends on the worship of God to the service of the poor ? And should not true service make devotional worship unnecessary for such a man ?

A. I sense mental laziness as also agnoticism in this question. The biggest of *Karmayogis* never give up devotional song or worship. Idealistically it may be said that true service of others is itself worship and that such devotees do not need to spend any time in songs etc. As a matter of fact, *bhajans* etc. are a help to true service and keep the remembrance of God fresh in the heart of the devotee.

New Delhi, 5-10-'46

Harijan, 13-10-'46

9

BREAD LABOUR

The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on " bread labour ". But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian writer named T. M. Bondaref. Tolstoy advertised it and gave it wider publicity. In my view the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the *Gita*, where we are told, that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean bread labour.

Reason too leads us to an identical conclusion. How can a man, who does not do body labour, have the right to eat? 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread,' says the Bible. A millionaire cannot carry on for long, and will soon get tired of his life, if he rolls in his bed all day long, and is even helped to his food. He therefore induces hunger by exercise, and helps himself to the food he eats. If every one, whether rich or poor, has thus to take exercise in some shape or form, why should it not assume the form of productive, i.e. bread labour? No one asks the cultivator to take breathing exercise or to work his muscles. And more than nine-tenths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, healthier and more peaceful would the world become, if the remaining tenth followed the example of the overwhelming majority, at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food! And many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be easily redressed, if such people took a hand in it. Again invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, when every one without exception acknowledged the obligation of bread labour. It is common to all the *varnas*. There is a world-wide conflict between capital and labour, and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for

their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated ; the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property, and would use it mainly in the public interest.

Bread labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe non-violence, worship truth, and make the observance of *brahmacharya* a natural act. This labour can truly be related to agriculture alone. But at present at any rate, everybody is not in a position to take to it. A person can therefore spin or weave, or take up carpentry or smithery, instead of tilling the soil, always regarding agriculture however to be the ideal. Every one must be his own scavenger. Evacuation is as necessary as eating ; and the best thing would be for every one to dispose of his own waste. If this is impossible, each family should see to its own scavenging. I have felt for years, that there must be something radically wrong, where scavenging has been made the concern of a separate class in society. We have no historical record of the man, who first assigned the lowest status to this essential sanitary service. Whoever he was, he by no means did us a good. We should, from our very childhood, have the idea impressed upon our minds that we are all scavengers, and the easiest way of doing so is, for every one who has realized this, to commence bread labour as a scavenger. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help one to a true appreciation of the equality of man.

Yeravda Mandir, 1930

From Yeravda Mandir, chap. IX

10

DUTY OF BREAD LABOUR

May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" perhaps applies here well.

Mere mental, that is, intellectual labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal state, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the law of bread labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man.

Return to the villages means a definite voluntary recognition of the duty of bread labour and all it connotes. But says the critic, "Millions of India's children are today living in the villages and yet they are living a life of semi-starvation." This, alas, is but too true. Fortunately we know that theirs is not voluntary obedience. They would perhaps shirk body labour if they could, and even rush to the nearest city if they could be accommodated in it. Compulsory obedience to a master is a state of slavery, willing obedience to one's father is the glory of sonship. Similarly compulsory obedience to the law of bread labour breeds poverty, disease and discontent. It is a state of slavery. Willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health which is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold. The Village Industries Association is an experiment in willing bread labour.

Harijan, 29-6-'35

11

NECESSITY OF BODILY LABOUR

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not discount the value of intellectual labour, but no amount of it is any compensation for bodily labour which every one of us is born to give for the common good of all. It may be, often is, infinitely superior to bodily labour, but it never is or can be a substitute for it, even as intellectual food though far superior to the grains we eat never can be a substitute for them. Indeed, without the products of the earth those of the intellect would be an impossibility.

Young India, 15-10-'25

12

INTELLECTUAL AND MANUAL WORK

Q. Why should we insist on a Rabindranath or Raman earning his bread by manual labour? Is it not sheer wastage? Why should not brain workers be considered on a par with manual workers, for both of them perform useful social work?

A. Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation. It will serve to improve even the quality of his intellectual output. I venture to say that in ancient times Brahmins worked with their body as with their mind. But even if they did not, body labour is a proved necessity at the present time.

Dharmapur (Noakhali), 6-2-'47

Harijan, 23-2-'47

SECTION THREE: EQUAL DISTRIBUTION

13

EQUAL DISTRIBUTION

In last week's article on the Constructive Programme * I mentioned equal distribution of wealth as one of the thirteen items.

The real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural needs and no more. For example, if one man has a weak digestion and requires only a quarter of a pound of flour for his bread and another needs a pound, both should be in a position to satisfy their wants. To bring this ideal into being the entire social order has got to be reconstructed. A society based on non-violence cannot nurture any other ideal. We may not perhaps be able to realize the goal, but we must bear it in mind and work unceasingly to near it. To the same extent as we progress towards our goal we shall find contentment and happiness, and to that extent too shall we have contributed towards the bringing into being of a non-violent society.

It is perfectly possible for an individual to adopt this way of life without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can observe a certain rule of conduct, it follows that a group of individuals can do likewise. It is necessary for me to emphasize the fact that no one need wait for any one else in order to adopt a right course. Men generally hesitate to make a beginning if they feel that the objective cannot be had in its entirety. Such an attitude of mind is in reality a bar to progress.

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* See *Harijan* of 18-8-'40, p. 252.

Now let us consider how equal distribution can be brought about through non-violence. The first step towards it is for him who has made this ideal part of his being to bring about the necessary changes in his personal life. He would reduce his wants to a minimum, bearing in mind the poverty of India. His earnings would be free of dishonesty. The desire for speculation would be renounced. His habitation would be in keeping with the new mode of life. There would be self-restraint exercised in every sphere of life. When he has done all that is possible in his own life, then only will he be in a position to preach this ideal among his associates and neighbours.

Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbours. How is this to be brought about? Non-violently? Or should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? To do this we would naturally have to resort to violence. This violent action cannot benefit society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. Therefore the non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society. In this argument honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed.

As soon as a man looks upon himself as a servant of society, earns for its sake, spends for its benefit, then purity enters into his earnings and there is *ahimsa* in his venture. Moreover, if men's minds turn towards this way of life, there will come about a peaceful revolution in society, and that without any bitterness.

It may be asked whether history at any time records such a change in human nature. Such changes have certainly taken place in individuals. One may not perhaps be able to point to them in a whole society. But this only means that up till now there has never been an experiment

on a large scale on non-violence. Somehow or other the wrong belief has taken possession of us that *ahimsa* is pre-eminently a weapon for individuals and its use should, therefore, be limited to that sphere. In fact this is not the case. *Ahimsa* is definitely an attribute of society. To convince people of this truth is at once my effort and my experiment. In this age of wonders no one will say that a thing or idea is worthless because it is new. To say it is impossible because it is difficult, is again not in consonance with the spirit of the age. Things undreamt of are daily being seen, the impossible is ever becoming possible. We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence. The history of religion is full of such examples. To try to root out religion itself from society is a wild-goose chase. And were such an attempt to succeed, it would mean the destruction of society. Superstition, evil customs and other imperfections creep in from age to age and mar religion for the time being. They come and go. But religion itself remains, because the existence of the world in a broad sense depends on religion. The ultimate definition of religion may be said to be obedience to the law of God. God and His law are synonymous terms. Therefore God signifies an unchanging and living law. No one has ever really found Him. But *avatars* and prophets have, by means of their *tapasya*, given to mankind a faint glimpse of the eternal law.

If, however, in spite of the utmost efforts the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find the solution to this riddle I have lighted on non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society. Man has been conversant with violence from the beginning, for he has inherited this strength from the animal in his nature. It was only

when he rose from the state of a quadruped (animal) to that of a biped (man) that the knowledge of the strength of *ahimsa* entered into his soul. This knowledge has grown within him slowly but surely. If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread amongst the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.

Harijan, 25-8-'40

14

ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Q. While working the constructive programme can a Congressman preach economic equality ? How can working the civil disobedience programme bring it about ?

A. You can certainly preach it, if your speech is strictly non-violent and not in the manner of some who, I know, have preached forcible dispossession of landowners and capitalists. But I have shown a better way than preaching. The constructive programme takes the country a long way towards the goal. This is the most auspicious time for it. The *charkha* and the allied industries, if fully successful, practically abolish all inequalities, both social and economic. The rising consequences of the strength which non-violence gives to the people, and their intelligent refusal to co-operate in their slavery must bring about equality.

Harijan, 25-1-'42

15

MEANING OF ECONOMIC EQUALITY

"What exactly do you mean by economic equality," Gandhiji was asked at the Constructive Workers' Conference during his recent tour of Madras.

His reply was that economic equality of his conception did not mean that every one would literally have the same amount. It simply meant that everybody should have enough for his or her needs. For instance, he required two shawls in winter whereas his grand-nephew Kanu Gandhi who stayed with him and was like his own son did not require any warm clothing whatsoever. Gandhiji required goat's milk, oranges and other fruit. Kanu could do with ordinary food. He envied Kanu but there was no point in it. Kanu was a young man whereas he was an old man of 76. The monthly expense of his food was far more than that of Kanu but that did not mean that there was economic inequality between them. The elephant needs a thousand times more food than the ant, but that is not an indication of inequality. So the real meaning of economic equality was: "To each according to his need." That was the definition of Marx. If a single man demanded as much as a man with wife and four children that would be a violation of economic equality.

"Let no one try to justify the glaring difference between the classes and the masses, the prince and the pauper, by saying that the former need more. That will be idle sophistry and a travesty of my argument," he continued. "The contrast between the rich and the poor today is a painful sight. The poor villagers are exploited by the foreign government and also by their own countrymen — the city-dwellers. They produce the food and go hungry. They produce milk and their children have to go without it. It is disgraceful. Every one must have a balanced diet, a decent house to live in, facilities for the

education of one's children and adequate medical relief." That constituted his picture of economic equality. He did not want to taboo everything above and beyond the bare necessaries, but they must come after the essential needs of the poor are satisfied. First things must come first.

Harijan, 31-3-'46

16

ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Q. Do you hold that all persons who perform useful and necessary service in society, whether farmer or *bhangi*, engineer or accountant, doctor or teacher, have a moral right only to equal wages with the rest ? Of course, it is understood, educational or other expenses shall be a charge of the State. Our question is, should not all persons get the same wages for their personal needs ? Do you not think that if we work for this equality, it will cut sooner under the root of untouchability than any other process ?

A. I have no doubt that if India is to live an exemplary life of independence which would be the envy of the world, all the *bhangis*, doctors, lawyers, teachers, merchants and others would get the same wages for an honest day's work. Indian society may never reach the goal but it is the duty of every Indian to set his sail towards that goal and no other if India is to be a happy land.

Harijan, 16-3-'47

17

QUESTION BOX

Q. What can one do if in spite of putting in a full day's labour, one cannot get enough to eat?

A. The labourer is worthy of his hire. This law is as old as the hills. All useful labour ought to bring in the same and adequate wages to the labourer. Till that time comes, the least that should be done is to see that every labourer gets enough to feed and clothe himself and his family. A government that does not ensure this much is no government. It is anarchy. Such a State should be resisted peacefully. Looting of grain shops and rowdyism is not the remedy. It leads to needless loss and death. Even if the authorities give in out of fear, it does not really help them or the people. It does not remove anarchy and things remain as they were. A look round the world will confirm what is here stated.

If, in spite of the collections of food grain in the depots, the hungry cannot get it, they can offer peaceful Satyagraha. They should not take by force what has not been given to them. They can go on a fast unto death and thus secure relief for themselves and for others. If they have patience, the method suggested by me is sure of success.

Mussoorie, 29-5-'46

Harijan, 9-6-'46

18

QUESTION BOX

Q. On what principle is the question of the salaries of ministers in Congress majority provinces going to be settled this time? Does the Karachi resolution in this regard still hold? If the question is to be settled on the basis of the present high prices, is it possible, within the limits of their revenues, for the provincial budgets to increase the pays of all their servants threefold? If not, will it be proper for the ministers to be paid Rs 1,500/- while a *chaprasi* or a teacher is told to make two ends meet on Rs 15/- and 12/- per month! and not make a fuss about it because Congress has to run the administration?

A. The question is apt. Why should a minister draw Rs 1,500/- and a *chaprasi* or a teacher Rs 15/- per month? But the question cannot be solved by the mere raising of it. Such differences have existed for ages. Why should an elephant require an enormous quantity of food and a mere grain suffice for the ant? The question carries its own answer. God gives to each one according to his need. If we could as definitely know the variations in the needs of men as those of the elephant and the ant, no doubts would arise. Experience tells us that differences in requirements do exist in society. But we do not know the law governing them. All therefore that is possible today is to try to reduce the differences as far as possible. The reduction can be brought about by peaceful agitation and by the creation of public opinion. It cannot be done by force or by *duragraha* in the name of Satyagraha. The ministers are the people's men. Their wants even before they took office were not those of *chaprasis*. I would love to see a *chaprasi* become worthy of holding the office of a minister and yet not increase his needs. It should also be clearly understood that no ministers need draw up to the maximum of the salary fixed.

It is worth while pondering over one thing that arises out of the questions. Is it possible for the *chaprasi* to support himself and his family on Rs 15/- per month without taking bribes? Should he not be given enough to keep him above temptation? The remedy for this is that as far as possible we should be our own *chaprasis*. But even so if we need them we must pay them enough for their requirements. In this way the big gulf that exists between minister and *chaprasi* will be bridged.

New Delhi, 14-4-'46

Harijan, 21-4-'46

19

EQUAL PAY

Speaking after prayers Gandhiji said that he for one believed that under ideal conditions the barrister and the *bhangi* should both get the same payment. But he knew, as everybody else did, that society all the world over was far from the ideal. It was not possible to pay every one Rs 100 per day. He knew too that the barrister did not deserve what he got. But clients gladly paid fabulous fees. Coming lower down, people would gladly pay four rupees a day to a tailor, but not more than eight annas per day to a sweeper. Society needed patient and sustained education to bring it to the same level in earning. It required much advanced training to reach that state of equality. Meanwhile every effort must be made to bridge the gulf between the payments of the higher and the lower ranks. The Pay Commission had done that. If it was not a satisfactory rise, the causes must be examined. Among these must be the capacity of the country to bear the additional burden. There was no such thing as an abrupt ascent in life. Let them not kill the goose that laid the golden egg. That process would spell insolvency of the land.

Harijan, 10-8-'47

SECTION FOUR : INDUSTRIES

20

MACHINERY AND MAN

[The following is taken from Shri Mahadev Desai's article in the *Harijan* in connection with the *Hind Swaraj* special number of the *Aryan Path*. This article was subsequently published as a preface to the new edition of *Hind Swaraj* in 1938. —Ed.]

Replying to a question whether he was against *all* machinery, Gandhiji said :

" How can I be when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery ? The spinning wheel is a machine ; a little toothpick is a machine. What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind but *for all.* I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might.... The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not tend to atrophy the limbs of man. For instance, I would make intelligent exceptions. Take the case of the Singer's sewing machine. It is one of the few useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself."

" But," asked the questioner, " there would have to be a factory for making these sewing machines, and it would have to contain power-driven machinery of ordinary type."

"Yes," said Gandhiji, in reply. "But I am socialist enough to say that such factories should be nationalized, State-controlled. The saving of the labour of the individual should be the object, and not human greed the motive. Thus, for instance, I would welcome any day a machine to straighten crooked spindles. Not that blacksmiths will cease to make spindles; they will continue to provide spindles but when the spindle goes wrong every spinner will have a machine to get it straight. Therefore replace greed by love and everything will be all right."

"But," said the questioner, "if you make an exception of the Singer's sewing machine and your spindle, where would these exceptions end?"

"Just where they cease to help the individual and encroach upon his individuality. The machine should not be allowed to cripple the limbs of man.

"Ideally, I would rule out all machinery, even as I would reject this very body, which is not helpful to salvation, and seek the absolute liberation of the soul. From that point of view I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain because, like the body they are inevitable. The body itself, as I told you, is the purest piece of mechanism; but if it is a hindrance to the highest flights of the soul, it has to be rejected."

21

ECONOMIC DECENTRALIZATION

Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life. Therefore, the formula so far evolved is, every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities.

Heavy industries will needs be centralized and nationalized. But they will occupy the least part of the vast national activity which will mainly be in the villages.

Constructive Programme, p. 12 (1941)

22

PREVENTION OF EXPLOITATION — PASSIVE AND ACTIVE

In reply to a question by Maurice Frydman, viz. "What then is the secret of your concentration on the village?" Gandhiji said:

"I have been saying that if untouchability stays, Hinduism goes; even so I would say that if the village perishes India will perish too. It will no more be India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers, as the problems of competition and marketing come in. Therefore, we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use. Provided this character of the village industry is maintained, there would be no objection to villages using even modern machines and tools that they can make and can afford to use. Only they should not be used as a means of exploitation of others".

"I have been trying to understand your village industries movement," said Mr. Frydman, "for the last two years, but I have learnt today in a few minutes what I had not learnt during these two years. You are more radical than Socialists. They are against the worker being exploited; you are not only against this, but also against the worker exploiting others."

Harijan, 29-8-'36

23

THE MENACE OF AN INDUSTRIALIZED INDIA

'God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West,' Gandhiji observed to a big financier. 'The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts. Unless the capitalists of India help to avert that tragedy by becoming trustees of the welfare of the masses, and by devoting their talents not to amassing wealth for themselves but to the service of the masses in an altruistic spirit, they will end either by destroying the masses or being destroyed by them.'

Young India, 20-12-'28

24

Industrialization is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind. Exploitation of one nation by another can not go on for all time. Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors. It is because these factors are getting less and less every day for England that its number of unemployed is mounting up daily. The Indian boycott was but a flea-bite. And if that is the state of England, a vast country like India cannot expect to benefit by industrialization. In fact, India, when it begins to exploit other nations — as it must if it becomes industrialized — will be a curse for other nations, a menace to the world. And why should I think of industrializing India to exploit other nations? Don't you see the tragedy of the situation, viz. that we can find work for our 300 million unemployed, but England can

find none for its three million and is faced with a problem that baffles the greatest intellects of England ? The future of industrialism is dark. England has got successful competitors in America, France, Japan and Germany. It has competitors in the handful of mills in India, and as there has been an awakening in India, even so there will be an awakening in South Africa with its vastly richer resources — natural, mineral and human. The mighty English look quite pigmies before the mighty races of Africa. They are noble savages after all, you will say. They are certainly noble, but no savages ; and in the course of a few years the Western nations may cease to find in Africa a dumping ground for their wares. And if the future of industrialism is dark for the West, would it not be darker still for India ?

Young India, 12-11-'31

25

ALTERNATIVE TO INDUSTRIALISM

I do not believe that industrialization is necessary in any case for any country. It is much less so for India. Indeed, I believe that Independent India can only discharge her duty towards a groaning world by adopting a simple but ennobled life by developing her thousands of cottages and living at peace with the world. High thinking is inconsistent with complicated material life based on high speed imposed on us by Mammon worship. All the graces of life are possible only when we learn the art of living nobly.

Whether such plain living is possible for an isolated nation, however large geographically and numerically, in the face of a world armed to the teeth and in the midst of pomp and circumstance is a question open to the doubt of a sceptic. The answer is straight and simple. If plain life is worth living, then the attempt is worth making even though only an individual or a group makes the effort.

At the same time I believe that some key industries are necessary. I do not believe in arm-chair or armed socialism. I believe in action according to my belief, without waiting for wholesale conversion. Hence, without having to enumerate key industries, I would have State ownership, where a large number of people have to work together. The ownership of the products of their labour, whether skilled or unskilled, will vest in them through the State. But as I can conceive such a State only based on non-violence, I would not dispossess moneyed men by force but would invite their co-operation in the process of conversion to State ownership. There are no *pariahs* of society, whether they are millionaires or paupers. The two are sores of the same disease. And all are men "for a' that".

On the train to Delhi, 25-8-'46

Harijan, 1-9-'46

26

INDUSTRIALIZATION

Q. The Government has been introducing schemes of industrializing the country for the maximum utilization of her raw materials, not of her abundant and unused man-power which is left to rot in idleness. Can such schemes be considered *swadeshi*?

A. The question has been well put. I do not exactly know what the Government plan is. But I heartily endorse the proposition that any plan which exploits the raw materials of a country and neglects the potentially more powerful man-power is lopsided and can never tend to establish human equality.

Real planning consists in the best utilization of the whole man-power of India and the distribution of the raw products of India in her numerous villages instead of sending them outside and rebuying finished articles at fabulous prices.

Harijan, 23-3-'47

27

RETURN TO VILLAGE INDUSTRIES

I have no partiality for return to the primitive methods of grinding and husking for the sake of them. I suggest the return, because there is no other way of giving employment to the millions of villagers who are living in idleness.

Harijan, 30-11-'34

SECTION FIVE: MINIMUM WAGE

28

NEED FOR A STANDARD WAGE

The following questionnaire to its agents and others has been issued by the All-India Village Industries Association, the answers to reach the Central Office, Wardha, before 1st August next:

"It has been proposed that we should insist on the village artisan getting an adequate return for his labour in connection with all articles produced or sold under the aegis of the A. I. V. I. A. For this purpose it will be necessary to fix a working-wage standard. Such standard should be the same for either sex for equal quantity of work. It may be based on an eight-hour day with a prescribed minimum output. Such wage will enter into the cost and the price should be fixed in relation to this. Ordinarily we may not be able to fix the prices in the competitive market, but we may do so for articles which do not enter into competition and for goods chosen for their special virtues which are appreciated by the consumers.

This questionnaire is sent out to invite your opinion on the following points:

1. Do you think it feasible to fix a minimum daily wage and ensure it to the workers by fixing prices?

2. Should we fix our ultimate standard and work up towards it, or should we start with a low minimum and then raise it as we proceed?

3. On what basis should it be arrived at? Can you suggest a subsistence wage, taking into consideration only food for the time being, as clothing should be made by personal effort? Will half an anna per hour be too low?"

Associations like the A. I. S. A.* and the A. I. V. I. A. and such philanthropic institutions may not follow the commercial maxim of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. The A. I. S. A. has certainly tried to buy in the cheapest market. Of this, however, in

* All-India Spinners Association

another column. Wishing to give the A. I. V. I. A. the benefit of my experience of the evolution of *khadi*, I initiated a discussion about the wages received by the artisans working under its influence. The result was the questionnaire.

It has already been discovered that the tendency among agents is to produce the required articles at as low prices as possible. Where may the axe be laid if not upon the artisan's earnings? Unless, therefore, a minimum rate be fixed, there is every danger of the village artisan suffering though it is for his sake that the A. I. V. I. A. has been brought into being. We have exploited the poor patient villagers far too long. Let not the A. I. V. I. A. intensify the exploitation under the guise of philanthrophy. Its aim is not to produce village articles as cheap as possible, it is to provide the workless villagers with work at a living wage.

It has been argued that anything that may raise the prices of articles made in the villages will defeat the purpose for which the A. I. V. I. A. has been brought into being, for it is said nobody will buy the village articles if the prices are too high. Why should the price of an article be considered too high, if it only provides a living wage for the manufacturer? The buying public has to be instructed to know the abject condition of the people. If we are to do justice to the toiling millions we must render to them their due; we must pay them a wage that will sustain them; we must not take advantage of their helplessness and pay a wage that would hardly give them one full meal.

It is quite clear that the Association must refuse to compete with mill manufactures. We may not take part in a game in which we know we must lose. In terms of metal, the big combines, whether foreign or indigenous, will always be able to outbid the effort of the human hand. What the Association seeks to do is to substitute false and non-human economics by true and human economics. Not killing competition, but life-giving

co-operation, is the law of the human being. Ignoring the emotions is to forget that man has feelings. Not the good of the few, not even the good of the many, but it is the good of all that we are made to promote, if we are 'made in His own image'.

A philanthrophic body like the A. I. V. I. A. cannot shirk a consideration of the problems involved in the questionnaire. If the true solution appears to be impracticable, it must be its endeavour to make it practicable. Truth is ever practicable. Thus considered, the programme of the Association may fitly be called adult education.

And if the Association is to secure for the artisan under its care a living wage, it must also pry into his domestic budget and trace the course of every coin that is paid.

The most difficult question to determine would be the minimum or the living wage. I have suggested eight annas for eight hours' strenuous labour converted into a given quantity of the particular goods turned out by an artisan of good ability. Eight annas is a mere token representing a certain quantity of necessaries of life. If in a family of five there are two full workers they would earn at the proposed rate Rs 30 per month allowing no holiday and no sickness gap. Thirty rupees per month is no extravagant income for five mouths. The method here proposed necessarily ignores the distinction of sex or age. But every referee will draw upon his own personal experience and report accordingly.

Harijan, 13-7-'35

29

MINIMUM LIVING WAGE

The most important thing that came before the Board * was the question of a minimum living wage for workmen and artisans. The question of a similar wage for spinners had engaged the attention of all *khadi* workers, and could not yet have been said to have been solved. But the present question was rather simpler, inasmuch as the field was new and we were to start afresh with certain cottage industries. The whole question was discussed threadbare for two days and the members seemed to be unanimous on one point, viz. that we must ensure all workmen with whom we dealt, a wage which would give them a reasonably balanced diet. That this diet may cost an anna and a half in Bihar and four annas in Gujarat and six in Bombay was a different question, though even there one may not deceive oneself by the fact that the poorest could live on a stale loaf or an unleavened bread and a pinch of salt. Those things were not the minimum to keep a man fit to put in a normal quota of work all the year round. It was hence agreed that a balanced diet must be devised for every province, taking good care that the workman or work-woman got a sufficient allowance of milk and *ghee* and vitamins in his or her diet. 'If we find,' said Gandhiji, 'that it is not possible for any industry to pay this minimum living wage, we had better close our shop. We should see that in any industry that we handle, the wage covers a reasonable maintenance allowance.'

Gandhiji made it clear that we were exclusively concerned with dead or dying industries which we were trying to revive and we were not going to disturb the existing industries. Was the minimum wage likely to make matters difficult for the villager? What about the

* of the All-India Village Industries Association

little articles of the villager's daily need — earthen pots and lamps for instance? Because the townspeople were to pay a higher price for those articles, were the villagers also to pay that higher price? Already villagers in villages in close proximity to towns were paying a higher price for milk than those in distant villages. 'That,' said Gandhiji, 'was inevitable. But the villagers among themselves will adjust the prices. Besides, when our organization is in good running order, the carpenter and the smith and the weaver and the spinner, who purchase from the potter at the minimum-wage price, will have also had their minimum-wage price for their respective wares, and they will not grudge the poor potter his price. But that is a distant goal. Let us at the present moment content ourselves with things that pass out of the villages to the towns and let us refuse to have them at anything less than the minimum-living-wage price'.

Harijan, 31-8-'35

30

ANOTHER DISCUSSION ON MINIMUM WAGE

There was a fresh discussion on the minimum wage in relation to *khadi*.

Gandhiji struck at the root of the objections by saying, "Our objective is, as the name implies, to represent the spinners who are the lowest-paid labourers, i.e. to improve their lot. Therefore, we have to show a progressive improvement in their lot. You must remember my earliest formula which holds good as much today as it did then — a spinning wheel in every home and a loom or looms in every village. That is the ideal of self-sufficing *khadi*, and if I could take you with me I would have you serve the spinners not so much by selling their *khadi* as by making them prepare it for their own use. We make our own *chapatis*, there are no hotels in villages; in the same way, all villages should make their own *khadi*. Not that some of them will not make extra *khadi* but that will depend only on the demand. We shall certainly take orders from the city people who will want our *khadi*, and we shall get that *khadi* done by those who will get a wage per hour proportionate to their daily need. This may mean a temporary rise in the present price of *khadi*. We may no longer exploit the poverty of the people. I have never said it was deliberate exploitation. I take the fullest responsibility for all we have done during the past fifteen years, and what we have done was inevitable. But we have now to strike a new departure. We have ignored the proletariat for centuries, and whilst we have arrogated to ourselves the right of commanding their labour, the thought had never crossed us that they have a right to dictate their wage, that labour is as much their capital as money is ours. It is time we began to think in terms of their needs, their hours of work and leisure and their standard of living."

Harijan, 14-9-'35

SECTION SIX : CAPITAL AND LABOUR

31

TO MILL-HANDS

[The following is from a free rendering of Gandhiji's address to the mill-hands of Ahmedabad on the occasion of the second anniversary of the struggle that took place in 1917, between the mill-owners and the mill-hands :]

Civil and Criminal Disobedience

Workmen would be committing suicide and India would have to suffer indescribable misery if working men were to vent their anger by criminal disobedience of the law of the land. I do wish that you would not be misled into acts of violence because sometimes you see violence seemingly answer the purpose for which it is intended. When I began to preach Satyagraha and civil disobedience it was never meant to cover criminal disobedience. My experience teaches me that truth can never be propagated by doing violence. Those who believe in the justice of their cause have need to possess boundless patience, and those alone are fit to offer civil disobedience who are above committing criminal disobedience or doing violence. A man cannot commit both civil and criminal disobedience at the same time even as he cannot be both temperate and furious at the same time, and just as self-restraint is acquired only after one has been able to master his passions, so is the capacity for civil disobedience acquired after one has disciplined oneself in complete and voluntary obedience of the laws of the land. Again, just as he alone can be said to be proof against temptations who, having been exposed to them, has succeeded in resisting them, so may we be said to have conquered anger when having sufficient cause for it we have succeeded in controlling ourselves. We failed last year in this test. It is my earnest prayer

to you all that on this auspicious day you will recall the mistakes of April last and make a fine determination never to repeat them.

Condition of the Mill-hands

I shall now say a few words about the condition in general of the mill-hands, of which they need to know a great deal. We cannot become rich by merely getting more wages ; nor is becoming wealthy the all in all. Anasuya-behn has not dedicated her life to you merely for the purpose of securing for you better wages. Her object in doing so is, that you may get enough to make you happy, to make you truly religious, that you may observe the eternal laws of ethics, that you may give up bad habits such as drink, gambling, etc., that you may make good use of your earnings, that you may keep your houses clean and that you may educate your children.

Your economic condition has improved. There is room for yet more improvement. It can take place in two ways by consultation with the mill-owners or by using undue pressure. The first is the only true remedy. In the West an eternal conflict has set up between capital and labour. Each party considers the other as his natural enemy. That spirit seems to have entered India also, and if it finds a permanent lodgment, it would be the end of our industry and of our peace. If both the parties were to realize that each is dependent upon the other, there will be little cause for quarrel.

A Lawful Demand

I do not propose to examine the duty of the capitalist. If the labourer alone were to understand his rights and responsibilities and confine himself to the purest means, both must gain. But two things are needful : both the demands and the means adopted to enforce them must be just and clear. It is an unlawful demand which seeks merely to take advantage of the capitalists' position. But it is an altogether lawful demand when the labourer asks for enough wages to enable him to maintain himself and to educate his children decently. To seek justice without

resorting to violence and by an appeal to the good sense of the capitalists by arbitration is lawful means.

Unions and Arbitration

In order then to achieve the end you must have Unions. A beginning has already been made. I trust that the mill-hands in every department will form their Unions and every one would scrupulously observe the rules that may be formed for them. You will then approach the mill-owners through your Unions and if the decisions of the former do not satisfy you, you will appeal to arbitration. It is a matter of satisfaction that both parties have accepted the principle of arbitration. I hope that that principle will be fully developed and that strikes will for ever become an impossibility. I know that strikes are an inherent right of the workingmen for the purpose of securing justice, but they must be considered a crime immediately the capitalists accept the principle of arbitration. Wages are improving and there is every possibility of continuous improvement. But there is equal need for reducing hours of labour. The mill-hands seem to be working twelve hours or more. Those who have to work so many hours per day can have no time left for mental or moral betterment. Their condition, therefore, must be reduced to that of the beast. It is our duty to escape the peril and yet in every step we take, we must guard ourselves against damaging our industries.

The mill-owners tell me that the mill-hands are lazy, they do not give full time to their work and they are inattentive. I for one cannot expect attention and application from those who are called upon to work twelve hours per day. But I would certainly hope that when the hours are reduced to ten, the labourers will put in better and almost the same amount of work as in twelve hours. Reduction in hours of labour has brought about happy results in England. When mill-hands learn to identify themselves with the interest of the mill-owners they will rise and with them will rise the industries of our country. I would therefore urge the mill-owners to reduce the hours of labour to

ten and urge the mill-hands to give as much work in ten as they have been doing in twelve.

Use of Increasing Wages

It is now time to examine the use we should make of the increasing wages and the hours saved. It would be like going into the frying pan out of the fire to use the increase in wages in grog-shops, and the hours saved, in the gambling dens. The money received, it is clear, should be devoted to the education of our children, and the time saved to our education. In both these matters the mill-owners can render much assistance. They can open cheap restaurants for the workingmen where they can get pure milk and wholesome refreshments. They can open reading-rooms and provide harmless amusements and games for them. Provided such healthy surroundings, the craving for drink and gambling will leave them. The Unions also should attempt similar things. They will be better employed in devising means of improvement from within than in fighting the capitalists.

Division of Labour

It is a sign of national degradation when little children are removed from schools and are employed in earning wages. No nation worthy of the name can possibly afford so to misuse her children. At least up to the age of sixteen they must be kept in schools. Similarly women also must be gradually weaned from mill-labour. If man and woman are partners in life and complementary each of the other they become good householders only by dividing their labour, and a wise mother finds her time fully occupied in looking after her household and children. But when both husband and wife have to labour for mere maintenance the nation must become degraded. It is like a bankrupt living on his capital.

Develop the Moral Faculty

And just as it is necessary for the labourers to develop their minds by receiving education and to educate their children, so it is necessary to develop the moral faculty in them. Development of the moral faculty means that of the religious sense. The world does not quarrel with those

who have a true faith in God and who understand the true nature of religion. And if it does, such men turn away the wrath of their adversaries by their gentleness. Religion here does not mean merely offering one's *namaz* or going to the temple. But it means knowledge of one's self and knowledge of God ; and just as a person does not become a weaver unless he knows the art of weaving, so does he fail to know himself unless he complies with certain rules. Chief amongst these are three that are of universal observance. The first is observance of truth. He who does not know what it is to speak the truth is like a false coin valueless. The second is not to injure others. He who injures others, is jealous of others, is not fit to live in the world. For the world is at war with him and he has to live in perpetual fear of the world. We are all bound by the tie of love. There is in everything a centripetal force without which nothing could have existed. Scientists tell us that without the presence of the cohesive force amongst the atoms that comprise this globe of ours, it would crumble to pieces and we would cease to exist ; and even as there is cohesive force in blind matter, so must there be in all things animate, and the name for that cohesive force among animate beings is Love. We notice it between father and mother, between brother and sister, friend and friend. But we have to learn to use that force among all that lives, and in the use of it consists our knowledge of God. Where there is love there is life ; hatred leads to destruction. I hope that Anasuyabehn will help you to learn this great law of Love and I ask you, if you recognize her love towards you, to reciprocate it by feeling in your own persons that same love towards the whole of humanity. The third rule is that we have to conquer our passions. It is called *brahmacharya* in Sanskrit. I do not use it merely in its accepted narrow sense. He is not a *brahmachari*, who, although he may be a celibate or may be living a chaste life as a married man, otherwise gives himself up to a variety of indulgences. He alone is capable of knowing himself who brings under complete subjection all his passions. He who exercises self-restraint in its

widest sense is also a *brahmachari* — a man of faith, a true Hindu or a true Mohammedan.

It is a breach of *brahmacharya* to hear questionable language or obscene songs. It is a licentiousness of the tongue to utter foul abuse instead of reciting the name of God, and so with the other senses. He alone can be considered a true man who having subjected his passions becomes perfectly self-restrained. We are like a rider who cannot keep his horse under control and is quickly brought down. But one who drawing in the reins keeps the animal under subjection, stands a fair chance of reaching his destination. Even so does a man who can control his passions make for the goal. He alone is fit for Swaraj. He alone is a seeker after truth. He alone becomes capable of knowing God. It is my earnest wish that you will not reject these remarks as if they were copy-book maxims. I ask you to believe that we shall never go forward until we have learnt the value of observing these truths. What I have told you is a fragment of my own experiences. My service of you is due simply to my love for you and I partake of your sorrows because I hope thereby to justify myself before my Maker. What though your wages were quadrupled and you had to work only a quarter of the time you are doing now, if notwithstanding, you did not know the value of true speech, if the *rakshasa* in you injured others and gave the reins to your passions. We must have more wages, we must have less work, because we want clean houses, clean bodies, clean minds and a clean soul, and both are essential for this fourfold cleanliness. But if that be not the object to be achieved, it would be a sin to attempt and get better wages and reduce the hours of labour. May God grant you and Anasuyabehn the power to achieve the end.

Young India, 28-4-'20 and 5-5-'20

32

AHMEDABAD LABOUR UNION

Ahmedabad Labour Union is a model for all India to copy. Its basis is non-violence, pure and simple. It has never had a set-back in its career. It has gone on from strength to strength without fuss and without show. It has its hospital, its schools for the children of the mill-hands, its classes for adults, its own printing press and *khadi* depot, and its own residential quarters. Almost all the hands are voters and decide the fate of elections. They came on the voters' list at the instance of the Provincial Congress Committee. The organization has never taken part in the party politics of the Congress. It influences the municipal policy of the city. It has to its credit very successful strikes which were wholly non-violent. Mill-owners and labour have governed their relations largely through voluntary arbitration. If I had my way, I would regulate all the labour organizations of India after the Ahmedabad model. It has never sought to intrude itself upon the All-India Trade Union Congress and has been uninfluenced by that Congress. A time, I hope, will come when it will be possible for the Trade Union Congress to accept the Ahmedabad method and have the Ahmedabad organization as part of the All-India Union. But I am in no hurry. It will come in its own time.

Constructive Programme (1941)

33

ORGANIZATION OF LABOUR

I am strongly against the exploitation of labour organizations for political purposes so long as the labourers themselves have not yet reached the stage of political consciousness which we desire for them. There can be no objection, however, for Congress organizations if they have resources for it, to help organizing labourers for their own economic amelioration. There is no objection, and it is our duty, to educate the working classes in politics and to make them take interest in Congress work, though we may not use their organizations as partners * in our political struggle.

Young India, 23-11-'22

34

LABOUR ORGANIZATION

" We may not use their organizations as pawns in our political struggle," I wrote about labour in last week's *Young India.* But ' pawns ' was printed ' partners ' and it has changed the whole meaning. They ought to be partners, but no pawns. If they be pawns then the struggle is ours and to use them is immoral. But if they are consciously in the struggle, then it is a battle, theirs as well as ours, in which they and we may fight together. I am against exploitation. I welcome conscious partnership of effort.

Young India, 30-11-'22

* This was misprinted for pawns in the *Young India* text. See next chapter.

35

AN AVOIDABLE STRUGGLE

The mill-owners of Bombay have threatened to stop the ususal bonus to their workmen this year. The three and a half *lakhs* of mill-hands will therefore lose the one month's pay which they had expected to get as " bonus ". This means in all probability a great struggle. The mill-owners can avert the undesirable conflict if they decide to lose a ninth of their profits or rather not to covet a further eighth. Their profits would not be below 18 per cent on paid up capital if they paid the bonus as usual. The mill-hands, on the other hand, would lose a ninth of their due wages if the bonus be cut out. A ninth out of bare maintenance of three and a half *lakhs* of workmen and their families and dependents is a serious thing as compared with a reduction by three and a half per cent of profits on capital. The mill-owners have ample time to reconsider their decision and avert a huge struggle and all its incidents.

Young India, 23-8-'23

36

MINIATURE SWARAJ *

As you know, I am a labourer myself. I pride myself on calling myself a scavenger, weaver, spinner, farmer and what not, and I do not feel ashamed that some of these things I know but indifferently. It is a pleasure to me to identify myself with the labouring classes, because without labour we can do nothing.

It was my ambition to see one of the greatest, if not the greatest, Indian enterprise in India, and study the conditions of work there. But none of my activities is

* From a speech by Gandhiji at an at-home given by the Indian Association, Jamshedpur.

one-sided, and as my religion begins and ends with truth and non-violence, my identification with labour does not conflict with my friendship with capital. And believe me, throughout my public service of 35 years, though I have been obliged to range myself seemingly against capital, capitalists in the end have regarded me as their true friend. And in all humility I may say that I have come here as a friend of the capitalists — a friend of the Tatas.

It would be ungrateful on my part, if I do not give you a little anecdote about how my connection with the Tatas began. In South Africa when I was struggling along with the Indians there in the attempt to retain our self-respect and to vindicate our status, it was the late Sir Ratan Tata who first came forward with assistance. He wrote me a great letter and sent me a princely donation — a cheque for Rs 25,000/- and a promise in the letter to send more if necessary. Ever since I have a vivid recollection of my relations with the Tatas, and you can well imagine how pleasurable it has been for me to be with you, and you will believe me when I say that when I part company with you tomorrow, I shall do so with a heavy heart, because I shall have to go away without having seen so many things, for it would be presumption on my part to say at the end of two days that I had really studied things here. I know well enough the magnitude of the task before one who wants to study this great enterprise.

I wish to this great Indian Firm all the prosperity that it deserves and to this great enterprise every success. And may I hope that the relations between this great house and labourers who work here under their care will be of the friendliest character ? At Ahmedabad I have had much to do with the capitalists and workmen and I have always said that my ideal is that capital and labour should supplement and help each other. They should be a great family living in unity and harmony, capital not only looking to the material welfare of the labourers but their moral welfare also — capitalists being trustees for the welfare of the labouring classes under them.

I am told that though so many Europeans and Indians live here, their relations are of a happy character. I hope the information is literally true. It is a privilege of both of you to be associated in this great enterprise and it is possible for you to give India an object-lesson in amity and goodwill. You will, I hope, have the best relations with one another not only under the roofs of the huge workshops you work in, but you will also carry your amity outside your workshops, and both of you will realize that you have come to live and work here as brothers and sisters, never regarding another as inferior, or oneself as inferior. And if you succeed in doing that, you will have a miniature *Swaraj.*

I have said that I am a non-co-operator. I call myself a civil resister — and both words have come to possess a bad odour in the English language like so many other English words — but I non-co-operate in order that I may be able to co-operate. I cannot satisfy myself with false co-operation, — anything inferior to 24 carat gold. My non-co-operation does not prevent me from being friendly even with Sir Michael O'Dwyer and General Dyer. It harms no one, it is non-co-operation with evil, with an evil system and not with the evil-doer. My religion teaches me to love even an evil-doer, and my non-co-operation is but part of that religion. I am saying these things not to soothe the ears of any one — I have in my life never been guilty of saying things I did not mean — my nature is to go straight to the heart, and if often I fail in doing so for the time being, I know that truth will ultimately make itself heard and felt, as it has often done in my experience. The wish therefore that the relations between you should be of the friendliest character is a desire from the bottom of my heart. And it is my deep prayer that you may help in delivering India from evil and bondage, and help her to give the message of peace to the outside world. For this meeting of Indians and Europeans in India must have or can be made to have a special meaning, and what can be better than that we two may live together so as to spread peace and goodwill on

earth? May God grant that in serving the Tatas you will also serve India and will always realize that you are here for a much higher mission than merely working for an industrial enterprise.

Young India, 20-8-'25

37

A DAY WITH AHMEDABAD MILL-HANDS

In the evening Gandhiji met the Ahmedabad mill-hands under the shade of the tree, which has, since the successful strike of 1918, become historic. For every yearly meeting they met under the tree where in 1918 they met for twenty-three long days and listened to Shrimati Anasuyabai and Gandhiji. It is of interest to note that Shri Ambalal Sarabhai and Shri Gordhanbhai Patel, the former a big mill-owner, and the latter Secretary of the Mill-owners' Association, also attended the function. The annual report of the Labour Union which was an exhaustive one was not read by the Secretary who in a businesslike manner summarized the salient features thereof. The Union had during the year under report a membership of 14,000 and an income from subscription of Rs 25,000. Every department has elected its representatives who met 74 times during the year, and the Union workers held no less than 130 meetings in the mill compounds during the noon recess. The Union attended to 743 complaints during the year — no strike authorized by the Union having taken place — and the Secretary notes with satisfaction that, "officials of the Union met with sympathetic and courteous treatment at the hands of the mill-authorities, who invariably evinced a sincere desire to do the just thing. We are able to say that some of the mills we have not had to visit till today for the purpose of making complaints." The Union has also opened a Savings Bank for the benefit of thrifty members, and advanced Rs 10,668/- on cheap loans. It is of interest to note that 50 per cent of these loans were for meeting the

deficit in current expenditure and 41 per cent for repayment of old debts in respect of which an interest of as much as 200 per cent had to be paid. The Union has a well-equipped hospital under a highly qualified doctor, and with special maternity and female wards. It also sold cheap *khaddar* worth Rs 2,662/- and cheap grain worth Rs 17,000/-. There is a special Social Betterment Department, which studies the conditions of the labourers. It collected information about 2,000 houses, and its investigations promise to go a great way in promoting the general enlightenment of the mill-hands and their social betterment. The Union has rightly appealed to the mill-owners for co-operation in this work, as a betterment in the condition of the mill-hands means a sure improvement in their efficiency. But it may be noted that the Union does not want to make the mill-owners' omissions a pretext for doing nothing. 'We understand,' says the report, 'that we have to come to the mills perfectly prepared to commence work right at starting time. We should not leave the workroom more frequently or a minute longer than is necessitated by urgent demands of nature. We should assure to the mills flawless work, careful handling of machinery, and minimum waste of materials and stores.' This is a resolve which will make the position of the Union especially strong and will entitle it in a special measure to the encouragement and sympathy of mill-owners. It reflects no little credit on the mill-hands also that one of the representatives who spoke at the meeting, frankly confessed that the excessive trade depression did not permit them to push forth their grievances in the matter of pay, and said that they should be satisfied if all the previous awards of the arbitrators were carried out by the mills.

Gandhiji in his speech laid special stress on the labourers' duty. He knew they had grievances about insufficient water supply, lack of dining sheds, inadequate cleaning of latrines, beatings and ill-treatment by jobbers, numerous breakages of ends in the throstle department and consequent less work and less wages. But he

was sure that some of the things depended on themselves, on their cultivation of proper self-respect. He was glad to note that the Union had redeemed the debts of some of them and substituted cheap loans for loans on exorbitant rates of interest. But it was a sad commentary on their way of life that they should have to borrow so much. Their wages may be insufficient, but he had no doubt that if they were more thrifty, free from drink and other evil habits, they would not have to be indebted. He was very glad that the mill-hands recognized the difficult situation of the mill-owners at the present moment. 'I am glad,' he said, 'you recognize this. You cannot ask for more pay when they are going through serious difficulties. A time may come when loyal labourers may have to come forward with an offer to serve without any wages, in order that the mills may not have to close down. But I know you are not prepared for that today. There is not that amount of trust betwen you and the mill-owners. You are labouring under numerous injustices, and unless the mill-owners have won you over by considerate and loving treatment, you are going to do nothing of the kind today. But that is a consummation towards which I want you to work.'

The relations between the Union and the Association are, it is pleasant to note, better than anywhere else in India. It is due, of course, to the existence of a well-organized and strong Union. Gandhiji had a frank chat with the Secretary of the Mill-owners' Association, drew his attention to the mill-owners' duties, told him how at Jamshedpur the Tatas left nothing to be desired at least in the matter of clean water supply and proper disposal of sewage, and asked him to take a leaf out of their book. The gentleman received the suggestion very kindly, and at the meeting of the schoolboys announced amidst cheers that he would make immediate payment of the arrears of their contribution to the expenses of the school, and would consider all the complaints in the matter of insufficient water supply, breakages of ends etc. that would be sent him.

Young India, 10-9-'25

PLIGHT OF MILL-HANDS

A letter from Calcutta gives me the following figures about, and description of, its mill-hands :

"The average numbers of mill-hands working at different mills in various parts of Bengal are:

Kanchrapara	12,000
Hajinagore, Naihati, Gouripore	30,000
Katharpara, Ichapore, Shamnagore ..	50,000
Kankinara, Jagdal	80,000
Titagar	1,25,000
Kamarhati, Cossipore, Dumdum, Beliaghata, Sealdah	65,000
Telinipara, Sreerampore, Rishra, Champdany, Salkhia, Sibpore, Howrah, Liloooah	1,50,000
Budge Budge, Bowria, Rajgunj, Tollygunj, Kidderpore	1,50,000
Total ..	6,62,000

"Most of the mill-hands are illiterate, their wives are more illiterate, and the morality of their children is becoming worse day by day. Their habits have been such that whatever they earn, they spend in gambling, wine and women. When their purses are empty they become confused for want of food and are compelled to take loans from Kabulis and other *mahajans* at the high rate of interest of two annas per rupee per month or even per week. These mill-hands are dying day by day for utter ignorance of knowledge. Is there no remedy to bring them out of this utter darkness ?"

I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the figures or the description, but both may be safely taken as generally correct. The writer of the letter says that Deshabandhu had promised to relieve them of their sufferings, "and asks me to complete the work that death prevented Deshabandhu from even beginning. He then suggests that I should find a capital of ten thousand rupees for helping a cinema company worker so that he may give exhibitions in the mill areas, and that looms and *charkhas* may be established in their midst.

The writer is well-meaning but it is clear that he does not know that the cinema will not make the men and women literate or wean them from the vices he mentions. He does not know also that these labourers are not likely to take to the looms or the spinning wheels as a supplementary occupation for they do not need it ; they may learn spinning and weaving to help them in *hartals* or when they are out of employment. Moral and social reforms amongst labourers is most difficult and taxing. It is slow work and can only be done at the hands of reformers who will live practically among their midst, and by their sterling character affect the lives of the mill-hands for the better. Such work requires no capital and whatever is required will be gladly paid for by the mill-hands themselves as is actually happening today in Ahmedabad and will presently happen in Jamshedpur.

Young India, 24-9-'25

39

NO AND YES

My communist comrade * finds fault with my work among the labourers in Jamshedpur because I accepted an address in Jamshedpur not from the Tatas but from the employees. His disapprobation is due, I expect, to the fact that the late Mr Ratan Tata was in the chair. Well, I am not ashamed of the honour. Mr Tata appeared to me to be a human and considerate employer. He readily granted, I think, all the prayers of the employees and I heard later that the agreement was being honourably kept. I do ask and receive donations for my work from the rich as well as the poor. The former gladly give me their donations. This is no personal triumph. It is the triumph of non-violence which I endeavour to represent, be it ever so inadequately. It is to me a matter of perennial satisfaction that I retain generally the affection and the trust of those whose

* Comrade Saklatwala

principles and policies I oppose. The South Africans gave me personally their confidence and extended their friendship. In spite of my denunciation of British policy and system I enjoy the affection of thousands of Englishmen and women, and in spite of unqualified condemnation of modern materialistic civilization, the circle of European and American friends is ever widening. It is again a triumph of non-violence.

Lastly about labour in the cities. Let there be no misunderstanding. I am not opposed to organization of labour, but as in everything else, I want its organization along Indian lines, or if you will, my lines. I am doing it. The Indian labourer knows it instinctively. I do not regard capital to be the enemy of labour. I hold their co-ordination to be perfectly possible. The organization of labour that I undertook in South Africa, Champaran or Ahmedabad was in no spirit of hostility to the capitalists. The resistance in each case and to the extent it was thought necessary was wholly successful. My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see, it is not to be realized. I therefore work for equitable distribution.

Young India, 17-3-'27

40

CAPITAL AND LABOUR

One would have thought, that at Nandi at any rate Gandhiji would not be called upon to suggest a solution of the increasing difficulties between Capital and Labour. But two mill magnates came with a pathetic account of their troubles. 'I do not know why the mill-hands are dissatisfied. We have been making no profits, and yet we have been giving them their bonuses all right. I feel that there is nothing that we have left undone for them, and yet they are dissatisfied, and find interested people to back them up.' And so on and so forth. 'Even then,' said Gandhiji, 'I can understand their having grievances. At

Sholapur wonderful welfare work is being done, and they are fairly well housed and well looked after. But even there one should not be surprised if the mill-hands were dissatisfied and asked for more. The managers there have devised a number of measures to minimize dissatisfaction, and you might confer with them.' 'I will, but I am at a loss to see in what respect my men can be dissatisfied.'

'Well,' said Gandhiji, 'if I was a capitalist, I should not continue my business for a single day, if my men felt that they were exploited and that they had not their minimum wants and comforts satisfied. But you will excuse me today. Let me get stronger and we shall then discuss the thing at length.'

Then came another friend who was not a magnate but who had to do with factory men. He did not know how he could persuade the men to wear *khadi*, as the wear and tear was too great in their case, making it dearer than mill cloth. 'Purchase *khadi* and sell it to them at slightly cheaper rates,' said Gandhiji. 'And if they want better *khadi*, persuade them to do some spinning, so that they may have better yarn. You should get it woven for them. He who wants to make his men happy and contended can do it in a variety of ways. Do you know of Lever Bros. ? Their Port Sunlight is an ideal colony.' But the friend seemed to have come for the pleasure of a discussion rather than for suggestions, as it appeared from the next question he asked : 'Supposing a mill was managed by a capitalist like Ford who kept his men under ideal conditions, would it not be proper to buy cloth produced by that mill ? ' 'No,' replied Gandhiji, 'for our spinning propaganda is not based on the miserable condition of mill labourers. It is based on the fact that mills cannot give employment to the mass of our starving millions. A network of mills, run on howsoever ideal lines, will not solve the problem of poverty.'

Young India, 9-6-'27

41

CAPITAL AND LABOUR

The labourers of the Maharja Mills, Bangalore, had been wanting to see Gandhiji ever since his arrival in Bangalore when they were on strike. And it was well that he could find some time for them. But all that he could give them was a word of love and cheer, and it was given in a fairly long talk one evening when they gathered to present their purse to him.

" I have been a labourer like you," said he, "ever since I entered public life, and came to know of the workmen's hardships and miseries in South Africa. And I have also come to the conclusion that you have to help yourselves, no one from outside can help you. In South Africa, there were nearly a hundred thousand workmen. Do you think I had the power to help them ? No ; they worked out their own emancipation. Only when they realized the extent of the cruel wrongs piled on them, did they wake up and succeed by dint of their own suffering. In the same way the ryots in Champaran and the mill-hands in Ahmedabad succeeded through penance and self-suffering. Neither in South Africa, nor here, did they resort to violence to vindicate their cause. They told their employers bravely that they must either concede their minimum, or do without them. In the meantime, they put up with suffering. That was true Satyagraha. It could be undertaken by even a boy or girl determined to win through suffering......A word about internal reform. You often quarrel among yourselves, you are given to drink, gambling and worse, and pass on the legacy to your children. If you want to qualify yourselves for Satyagraha you must get rid of these vices. I am glad you have contributed something for the welfare of those who are poorer than you. I would ask you also to wear *khadi* manufactured by the poor, and not mill-cloth which does not need your patronage." Concluding he said : " I do not think there need be any clash between

capital and labour. Each is dependent on the other. What is essential today is that the capitalist should not lord it over the labourer. In my opinion the mill-hands are as much the proprietors of their mills as the shareholders, and when the mill-owners realize that the mill-hands are as much mill-owners as they, there will be no quarrel between them. But there is no right in the world that does not presuppose a duty. An owner never spoils his property. When you know that the mill is as much yours as of the mill-owners, you will never damage your property, you will never angrily destroy cloth or machinery with a view to squaring your quarrel with the mill-owners. Fight, if you must, on the path of righteousness and God will be with you. There is no royal road, I repeat, to gaining your rights, except self-purification and suffering."

Young India, 4-8-'27

42

CAPITAL AND LABOUR

At the request of Sheth Kasturbhai, the agent of the Raipur Manufacturing Company, Gandhiji performed the opening ceremony of a creche for the benefit of the infants of the mill-hands working in the company's mills. The building was erected at a cost of Rs 25,000. Gandhiji in declaring the institution open said :

" My connection with the labour of this place is not of yesterday. It is as old as my first coming to this city, and so I make bold to tell you that you have not yet done your part towards your labouring population. In some cases the labourers have not been provided with even the primary amenities of life. There are exceptions, however. Some mill-owners have made some effort in the direction, and the present one is an instance in point.

In the West there is still a watertight division between the employer and the employees. I know it is impertinent to talk of our ideal, while the curse of

untouchability still stalks through the land. But I should be untrue to myself and be failing in my duty to you, if I did not place before you what I regard as the highest ideal. The relation between mill-agents and mill-hands ought to be one of father and children or as between blood-brothers. I have often heard the mill-owners of Ahmedabad refer to themselves as 'masters' and their employees as their 'servants'. Such loose talk should be out of fashion in a place like Ahmedabad which prides itself on its love of religion and love of *ahimsa*. For that attitude is a negation of *ahimsa*, in as much as our ideal demands that all our power, all our wealth and all our brains should be devoted solely to the welfare of those who, through their own ignorance and our false notions of things, are styled labourers or 'servants'. What I expect of you therefore is that you should hold all your riches as a trust to be used solely in the interest of those who sweat for you, and to whose industry and labour you owe all your position and prosperity. I want you to make your labourers co-partners of your wealth. I do not mean to suggest that unless you legally bind yourselves to do all that, there should be a labour insurrection. The only sanction that I can think of in this connection is of mutual love and regard as between father and son, not of law. If only you make it a rule to respect these mutual obligations of love, there would be an end to all labour disputes, the workers would no longer feel the need for organizing themselves into unions. Under the ideal contemplated by me, there would be nothing left for our Anasuyabehns and Shankarlals to do; their occupation would be gone. But that cannot happen until there is a single mill-hand who does not regard the mill in which he works as his own, who complains of sweating and overwork, and who therefore nurses in his breast nothing but ill-will towards his employers.

"And where is the difficulty?

"As our experience gradually broadens we are beginning to see more and more clearly that the more we give to our workers the more we stand to gain. From the moment your men come to realize that the mills are theirs

no less than yours, they will begin to feel towards you as blood-brothers, there would be no question of their acting against the common interest and the need for having a heavy supervisory establishment over them.

"I do not wish to detract from the merit of these efforts of yours, but I ask you whether any well-to-do man would care to send his children to a creche like this. Our endeavour should be to bring about a state of things under which there would be no occasion for a mill-hand's baby to be torn from the mother, and where a factory-hand's child would receive the same opportunities for education that our own children have."

Young India, 10-5-'28

43

AN IMPORTANT AWARD

The award given by the Umpire, Diwan Bahadur Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, in the matter referred to him by the unofficial permanent Arbitration Board appointed voluntarily by the Ahmedabad Mill-owners' Association and the Textile Labour Union is an important document. The Umpire's Judgment is a preparation evidencing a careful study of the facts of the case, and is a bold enunciation of the doctrine that when 'the worker does not get enough wages to enable him to maintain a suitable standard of living,' 'he can ask his employer to pay him wages which would enable him to do so.' The contention advanced by labour for the past many years and denied by employers that it is entitled to a living wage has been wholly accepted, as I maintain it was bound to be, by the Umpire. It is also worthy of note that he has found as a matter of fact that the average earnings of families of labourers including the lowest paid and the highest paid are not more than Rs 40 per month, and the expenses not less than Rs 50 per month. Now the matter referred to the Umpire was the demand made by labour for full restoration of the

cut of 15 per cent made in 1923 by the mill-owners in labour wages. The learned Umpire having granted the contention that labour is entitled to a living wage and that as a matter of fact Ahmedabad textile labour is not getting such a wage, it is not easy to understand why the whole of the cut has not been restored. The reader will note that even the restoration of the whole cut would not send up the wage to Rs 50 per month. The only explanation I can discover for this discrepancy between the finding on the theory and its actual enforcement in terms of wages is that the Umpire was afraid of his own finding, or that he hesitated to condemn, even by implication, the action of the mill-owners in making the cut in 1923, and that too not by arbitration, but by an arbitrary exercise of their power to coerce labour. For whilst it is quite true that the condition of the mill industry was not as prosperous as it was in the war period, it was a period of merely less profits, not of loss and encroachment upon capital. The question of a cut can occur, if at all, only when the wages are so good as to leave a margin after paying for living expenses, and when the industry concerned has to face an actual deficit. But the men are wedded to the principle of arbitration and therefore they must cheerfully submit to the Umpire's decision even though they do not get the full restoration of the cut. They must thankfully accept what the Diwan Bahadur has allowed, and perseveringly and peacefully work for the balance. Indeed there can be no rest for them or the employers so long as the living wage is not actually reached and better housing and other ordinary comforts are not secured. But it will be a great gain if strikes become unnecessary and the principle of arbitration is strictly adhered to by both parties.

Young India, 12-12-'29

44

MILLS AND LABOUR

The Congress lives for the labourer and for the capitalist in so far as the latter subserves the former's purpose. Therefore the Congress is in alliance with the mill-owners in the matter of boycott of foreign cloth, only because boycott is calculated to benefit the labourer and the vast mass of consumers in the very near future. The alliance is voluntary and capable of being broken up at the option of either party. It can be and will be broken up when the mills find it profitless. It may and must be broken up by the Congress if it injures *khadi*, or if it injures or exploits the labourer, or if it exploits the consumer. *Khadi* may suffer a temporary check as perhaps it has. The consumer may, for a year or two but no longer, pay a protection duty by way of higher prices, not for the higher profit of the shareholders but for the economic working of mills. But the Congress can never allow the labourer to be exploited. In other words, his position must not be worse than before the boycott. On the contrary, the alliance imposes a greater duty on the Congress of seeing that the labourer's position is all the better for it. The Congress has to ascertain the condition of the labourers of a particular mill before it enters into any contract with it.

It was because the Working Committee realized this special obligation that it passed the following resolution at its last meeting :

> "The Working Committee draws the attention of owners and managers of mills, especially those recognized by the Congress, to the resolution of the Working Committee dated July 10th, 1931,* and draws further attention to the fact that the Working Committee has received complaints about the treatment of textile labourers and the growing discontent amongst them, as also of proposed reduction of wages in some mills.

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* Here is the resolution of the Working Committee of 10th July, 1931 referred to above:

"The Committee hopes that the owners and managers will remove all causes of discontent. The Working Committee believes that representing, as the Congress does predominantly, the interests of millions of agricultural and industrial workers, any recognition by the Congress of the mills will be inconsistent with the claim, wherever there is previous justification for such complaints."

Among the private resolutions referred to the Committee by the A. I. C. C. at its last session was one referring to mill workers. It was a drastic resolution. I have before me a list of mills that are said to have threatened a cut in the wages. The Working Committee, therefore, passed the foregoing mild resolution. It enunciates its policy and duty in the matter. It constitutes an assurance to the labourers that the Congress will never be a party to any injury to labour, and it is a notice to the mill-owners of the Congress policy regarding labour. It must not on any account be treated as a threat of any kind whatsoever. It should be as much the mill-owners' interest as that of the Congress to guard the well-being of labour. The peaceful road to Swaraj lies through a co-ordination, not antagonism, of all national effort. And this co-ordination must move towards one grand consummation — freedom of labour whether on the field or in the factory.

Young India, 27-8-'31

"The Working Committee is of opinion, that the Textile Mills Exemption Committee should endeavour, wherever possible and necessary, to prevent by amicable arrangement any penalization or victimization of labour in the mills which have signed the Congress declaration, and to help in the bettering of labour conditions in these Mills." — Ed. *Y. I.*

A GREAT EQUALIZER *

You may know, if you do not know already, that I have been closely associated with labourers ever since I went to South Africa. In India or in whatever part of the world, they have recognized me as a fellow labourer and received me as one of themselves. You will perhaps be surprised to know that even labourers in Lancashire instinctively recognized me as one of themselves and flocked around me in hundreds and thousands. The only difference between us is that I have become a labourer by choice, whilst you have been made labourers by force of circumstances and would perhaps love to be masters if you could. I early gave up the ambition of becoming a master, for I would then have belonged to an inconsiderable class and could not have identified myself, as I do today to the best of my ability, with the penniless pauper, the half-starved and the naked, the lowliest and the lost. I want labourers not to deplore, much less to despise, their lot and to realize the dignity of labour.

It is meet that you have come forward with your purse as a token of your sympathy with the Harijans. Who has suffered so much as they? They are at the lowest rung of the ladder. The terrible hardships and privations they have to undergo can never be imagined by those who have not been victims to them. Other labourers may aspire to amass wealth and to become masters some day and thus to rise in the scale of social prestige; but the Harijans can never entertain that ambition. The stigma of untouchability attaches to them from the mother's womb. They are born outcastes and remain outcastes till death. They have to live in segregated areas and are denied the amenities of life that

* From a speech delivered before the B. N. Railway Labourers' Federation at Bilaspur on 25-11-'33.

the others enjoy. Even water, that free gift of God, is denied to them. I ask the Labour Federation to abolish all distinctions between Harijans and yourselves. I make the appeal deliberately for, being in direct touch with the mill-hands in Ahmedabad, I know that labourers do observe the distinction between Harijans and non-Harijans. I expect labourers, more than all others, to efface these distinctions. It has been my deep faith that we shall some day achieve communal unity through labourers. I consider labour to be a powerful unifying agent. It is a great equalizer. It should be a matter of shame to have communal divisions among labourers, who all earn their bread by the sweat of their brow and, therefore, belong to one vast brotherhood. Let them, therefore, begin with a thorough removal of untouchability. It will be a great step towards communal unity. Once the bar sinister against Harijans is removed, the way will be open for a wider unity among Hindus, Mussalmans and other sister communities.

Harijan, 8-12-'33

46

LABOUR AND CAPITAL

At Jubbulpore, in an address presented by the local Labour Union, they had asked Gandhiji why he did not take up the work of ameliorating the condition of labourers and protecting them against exploitation by capitalists. Gandhiji took up the subject in his speech. "If this effort," he said, "to abolish root and branch the distinctions of high and low succeeds, it will have a healthy reaction on all spheres of life, and the struggle between capital and labour will cease and give place to co-operation and concord between the two. If we have understood the full implications of this war against untouchability, we should have no difficulty in realizing that untouchability based on birth is only one of the countless phases of that curse. We should thus be better serving the cause of freedom and communal unity that I have at heart. My faith in the movement has grown from day to day. I implicitly believe that, if we succeed in abolishing untouchability from Hinduism, all the quarrels between classes and communities that we see today in India will cease. The differences between Hindus and Mussalmans and between capital and labour will be composed. Once the hearts are purified, it will be found easy to overcome all difficulties in the way of a heart unity.

Harijan, 15-12-'33

47

WITH HARIJAN LABOURERS

Gandhiji addressed a mass meeting of labourers in the mills, mostly Harijans, in Ahmedabad. Referring to their purse of Rs 50,000, Gandhiji said that they should not treat their donation as a license for future indulgence in the sin of untouchability among Harijans themselves, but as a token of their promise to banish untouchability altogether. They must not look down upon any one as lower than themselves, but regard themselves as the lowest of the low. The pride of assumed superiority goeth before destruction. They must, therefore, forget all gradations of rank as regards *dhedhs, chamars, bhangis* and the like. The Textile Labour Union was doing excellent work for them. But did they derive all possible benefit from it ? Kalyangram was a fine place, but if they remained dirty themselves and did not keep it clean, they might turn it into a public nuisance. Then again they were still addicted to drink and gambling and took carrion. They must overcome these evils and educate their children. If they thus became men of culture, real Harijans, every one would like to join their ranks and be one of them. *Savarna* Hindus were doing penance for their sin, but Harijans had a corresponding duty to perform by way of self-purification.

Harijan, 13-7-'34

48

LET LABOUR COMBINE *

Gandhiji said he had paid a hurried visit to the labour huts which seemed to him too small, too ill-lighted, and too low-roofed to be fit for human habitation. If the workers only knew what they could do for themselves by training and intelligent combination, they would realize that they were no less proprietors of the mines than the managers and shareholders. Their labour was better gold than the metal they extracted with their labour from the bowels of the earth. He reminded the mine-owners that unless they voluntarily recognized the due status of labour and treated it as they treated themselves, time was not far distant when labour would dictate its own terms. He told the workers that whilst it was right and proper to assert their rights, they ought to do their tasks as if the mines were their personal property. He also asked them to shun drink, gambling and other vices.

Harijan, 13-6-'36

* From a speech delivered before a mass meeting of mine-labourers of Kolar Gold Fields.

49

WITH MILL LABOURERS *

Eighteen years ago you carried on a peaceful strike for 21 days, without a single untoward incident happening. It was a hard test for you but you passed through the test. Then you weakened. You know what followed. But the whole success of that strike was due to the great banner under which you worked. That banner bore the words — *Unbreakable Vow*. Those who pledge themselves to a vow do so having full regard to consequences, and having full regard to their own capacities and limitations. The capacity to keep one's vow solemnly taken is all that we have and need have. We do not want the capacity to throw down bombs from aeroplanes, to fight with *lathis*. We are children of the earth and we had better talk in terms of the earth and not of the air. That capacity to keep a vow is your great capital. No one may deprive you of it, but it should be kept even unto death. It is worth a crore of rupees and more. Many a millionaire has had to commit suicide, his millions have not saved him from an ignominious death.

The question facing you seems to be this: Whether you have grown in strength or the mill-owners. If the mill-owners close the doors against arbitration you may have to resort to a strike. They may want to try your strength. Now I should like to suggest to the mill-owners that if you grow in strength, they have nothing to be afraid of. If they grow in strength you have everything to be afraid of. But let us see the difference between the mill-owners and the labourers. Their strength is their money, your strength is your capacity to work. Capital would be helpless without labour. All mills would be at a standstill if you were not there to work them. It may be that they may coerce you into working for them, but there is no

* From a speech delivered before the mill labourers at Ahmedabad.

doubt that they are helpless without labour. Labour thus possesses the key; I say labour, not the Labour Union.

Now on the other hand, if you were strong in numbers, even if you were a million, you would not be able to run a mill. You lack the talent to run it. You could not run it even if you had a million rupees. I should refuse to take charge of a mill, even if some one were to offer a million rupees to me. I should gladly use that million for *khadi* or Harijan work, but could not run a model mill. You are in the same condition. You have not acquired the capacity to run a mill even after 20 years of organized work, nor are you likely to acquire that capacity within the next 20 years. If you think you have, you do not need a leader to lead you.

I do wish you may acquire that capacity some day. It is certainly possible for you individually so to train yourselves as to be able to run a mill. In that case the rest of you will be as much slaves as you are today. What I mean to say is that you as a body could not run a mill in a given number of years.

But our friends who insist on class-consciousness and class-war say that everything is possible if only we fight as they would have us to. We may have to fight the mill-owners, but we should do so with the same love and regard and reluctance as we would fight our blood relations, our own kith and kin.

But what about the blacklegs? You may ask. Blacklegs unfortunately there will be. But I would urge you not to fight them, but to plead with them, to tell them that theirs is a narrow policy and that yours has the interest of the whole labour at heart. It is likely that they may not listen to you. In that case you will tolerate them, but not fight them.

I had an open letter from our friends who insist on class-war. They say and I agree with them that there should not be two unions in Ahmedabad, but they want a Union which accepts class-war as its creed, which means that they want us to merge in their union. Do not yield

to that temptation if you do not believe in the inevitability of class-war.

You and I believe in co-operation. If we sometimes non-co-operate with mill-owners we do so to reach co-operation ultimately. We want Ahmedabad and its mill-industry to prosper, but we want the prosperity broad-based on the harmony of all the varying elements.

I am one of the arbitrators and as such I may not speak on the merits of the general-strike question. I have only told you what should be done if a strike becomes a necessity. You know that it has to be absolutely peaceful. You must exhaust all your resources to reach a settlement. I am still hoping that a general strike may not be necessary. I shall strain every nerve to avert a crisis.

But remember that even if you have to fight, your capacity to keep your vow will depend on the purity of your life. A gambler or a drunkard, or a dissolute character can never keep a vow. Also remember that you have to fight on your own strength. Do not depend on Anasuyabehn or Shankarlal or me. We can but guide you. It is only your strength that can carry you through. I am but a broken reed. Not that I have ceased to take interest in you, but I have become a villager, and all my resources are being put to the test in that little village called Segaon. I have settled there because I believe that the key to Swaraj is not with the cities but with the villages. When I succeed in ridding the villages of their poverty, I have won Swaraj for you and for the whole of India. The villages are in a worse plight than you who live in cities. You have schools for your children and a hospital and many other amenities. They have none. They do not even realize their miserable plight, and they almost hug their present condition. If therefore I can discover the key to their emancipation, I discover the key to Swaraj. Their deliverance is also yours.

Harijan, 7-11-'36

50

A GREAT EXPERIMENT

The Ahmedabad Labour Union has of late started a great experiment which is likely to prove of much interest and importance to all labour organizations. The essence of the experiment consists in training its members to a supplementary occupation in addition to their principal occupation in the mills so that in the event of a lock-out, strike or loss of employment otherwise, they would always have something to fall back upon, instead of being faced with the prospect of starvation. A mill-hand's life is ever full of vicissitudes. Thrift and economy no doubt provide a sort of remedy and it would be criminal to neglect them. But the savings thus made cannot carry one far, seeing that the vast bulk of our mill labourers are always struggling on the margin of bare subsistence. Moreover it would never do for a working man during strike or unemployment to rest idly at home. There is nothing more injurious to his morale and self-respect than enforced idleness. The working class will never feel secure or develop a sense of self-assurance and strength unless its members are armed with an unfailing subsidiary means of subsistence to serve as a second string to their bow in a crisis.

The idea of a subsidiary occupation for the mill-hands was first conceived by me during the eventful twenty-three days' strike of the Ahmedabad mill-hands in the year 1918. It occurred to me then that if the strike was to be successful the mill-hands must have an occupation that would maintain them wholly or partly. They must not rely upon doles. During the strike many of them were employed on unskilled labour. It was then that I mooted my suggestion to teach mill-hands a subsidiary occupation. But my suggestion remained a dead letter till the next strike came. A sort of a beginning was made then. But it was difficult to bring into being all of a sudden an effective organization for teaching subsidiary occupations. With the end of the

second strike died also the effort to find and teach suitable occupations.

An organized and systematic effort is now being made by the Labour Union in that direction. Mill-hands are being taught to select occupations which they can practise in their leisure hours at home and which would give them substantial relief in times of unemployment. These are ginning, cleaning, carding, and spinning of cotton, weaving, tailoring, soap and paper making, type-setting, etc.

I hold that a working knowledge of a variety of occupations is to the working class what metal is to the capitalist. A labourer's skill is his capital. Just as the capitalist cannot make his capital fructify without the co-operation of labour, even so the working man cannot make his labour fructify without the co-operation of capital. And if both labour and capital have the gift of intelligence equally developed in them and have confidence in their capacity to secure a fair deal, each at the hands of the other, they would get to respect and appreciate each other as equal partners in a common enterprise. They need not regard each other as inherently irreconcilable antagonists. But the difficulty is that whilst today capital is organized and seems to be securely entrenched, labour is not. The intelligence of the working man is cramped by his soulless, mechanical occupation which leaves him little scope or chance to develop his mind. It has prevented him from realizing the power and full dignity of his status. He has been taught to believe that his wages have to be dictated by capitalists instead of his demanding his own terms. Let him only be organized along right lines and have his intelligence quickened, let him learn a variety of occupations, and he will be able to go about with his head erect and never be afraid of being without means of sustenance.

It is the grossest of superstitions for the working man to believe that he is helpless before the employers. The effort of the Labour Union in Ahmedabad is to dispel this superstition in a concrete manner. Its experiment, therefore, ought to be welcomed by all concerned. Success will

depend on an inflexible determination on the part of the Labour Union to follow up the good beginning that has been made, with unflagging perseverance. It must have the right sort of instructors who can arouse among the workers an intelligent interest in their work. A handicraft plied merely mechanically can be as cramping to the mind and soul as any other pursuit taken up mechanically. An unintelligent effort is like a corpse from which the spirit has departed.

(Adapted from the *Harijanbandhu*)
Harijan, 3-7-'37

51

AHMEDABAD MILL INDUSTRY

Now that the Ahmedabad Mill Industry has tided over the difficulty that had arisen over the mill-owners' demand for a cut in the wages of labour, it is well to examine the conditions of its stability. The Umpire, Sir Govindrao Madgavkar, deserves the thanks of both the parties for his great labour of love. He has reasoned out his award and made valuable suggestions for the guidance of both capital and labour.

It is to be hoped that both parties will wholeheartedly act up to the Umpire's suggestion and work out the Delhi Agreement. . . . The essential conditions of that agreement are that wages must be standardized for the whole mill industry and that there should be a scheme for automatic adjustment whenever there is a demand for a cut or a rise in the wages. It has been argued on behalf of the mill-owners that neither standardization nor automatic adjustment is a practical proposition. The Umpire has rejected that argument. Indeed he could not do otherwise. Surely the parties knew what they were doing when they entered into the agreement at Delhi. They would never have introduced the two clauses if they had thought them to be unworkable. It may be that the parties may not agree to a common scheme. It is for them to refer their differences

then to the arbitrators and the latter failing, to an Umpire. Standardization of wages is a mechanical or arithmetical proposition. It may be that an intermediate stage is necessary before all the mills can be induced to adopt an even scale of wages, or labour can in all cases be induced to accept a level which in some case must mean a large reduction in wages though the whole total remains unaffected. But a scheme of automatic adjustment of wages is undoubtedly a complicated matter. It demands for its fruition a spirit of give and take on both sides. And any such scheme must, in the nature of things, be of a temporary character subject to periodical revision.

No scheme of automatic adjustment is possible without reference to the maxims I have ventured to mention in my award and which Sir Govindrao has been pleased to dismiss as idealistic. Of course it was no part of his duty as Umpire to examine or refer to them at all. I have myself stated in my award that the maxims have not guided my decision. But having referred to them at all, the learned Umpire might have shown how or why they were idealistic.

I propose to show that whether they are idealistic or otherwise it is impossible to arrive at a satisfactory scheme of automatic adjustment without reference to them. They must be the measuring rod for action which may and will probably fall short of it. Let me reproduce below a translation of the original which is in Gujarati.

"16. At this stage I would like to re-state the principles that for the good of both parties I have presented to them as a result of my close and unbroken contact with the industry for a period of 18 years in the capacity of arbitrator.

(a) No cut should be made till the mills have ceased to make any profit and are obliged to fall back upon their capital for continuing the industry.

(b) There should be no cut till the wages have reached the level adequate for maintenance. It is possible to conceive a time when the workmen have begun to regard the industry as if it were their own property, and they would then be prepared to help it out of a crisis by taking the barest maintenance consisting of a dry crust and working day and night. That would be a

voluntary arrangement. Such cases are irrelevant to the present consideration.

(c) There should be a common understanding as to what should be included in determining a living wage.

(d) The consideration of the deterioration in individual mills cannot form part of a case for a cut in the wages of labour in general.

(e) It is vital to the well-being of the industry that workmen should be regarded as equals with the shareholders and that they have, therefore, every right to possess an accurate knowledge of the transactions of the mills.

(f) There should be a register of all available mill-hands acceptable to both the parties and the custom of taking labour through any agency other than the T. L. A. should be stopped.

17. I have not presented these principles in the belief that they will be acceptable either to the brother Arbitrator or to the mill-owners or even to the workmen. These have not guided decision in the present case, but I am convinced that without the acceptance of these principles the industry, i.e. the owners and the workmen are in danger."

Now take the first maxim. Why should mills desire a cut so long as they have profits? It would be like a man desiring to cut off his feet to ease some derangement of the belly. Do they cut out machinery in order to ensure a certain percentage of profits? Are men and women who may be called living machines less than inert machinery? Is there anything very idealistic in the suggestion that the wages of the operatives, who are at least as much a foundation of the industry as the machinery and buildings, may not be reduced to ensure a minimum of profits? I make bold to say that if the votes of humane shareholders (and I regard the shareholders of mills as humane) were taken, they would summarily reject the proposition that their profits should be preferred to the wages of labour on whom depend their profits.

And if the first maxim must at least be seriously considered, the second about the living wage follows from it. If there can be no cut before profits are on the brink of sinking, it is necessary to know the limit beyond which reduction in wages cannot go. In other words, there must be a decision as to what constitutes a living wage. I am not concerned with the name. Call it the minimum wage,

if that expression sounds sweeter. The process is the same. Living wage to my mind is the most accurate description for an irreducible wage.

And the acceptance of the principle of a living wage implies an examination of what may be included in it. Should intoxicants form part, should tobacco be included, may milk or *ghee* or *gur* be excluded? These are no visionary things. They touch the very existence of labour. Its efficiency depends very largely upon the right kind of living. And the greater the efficiency, the greater the possibility of enhanced profits.

Maxim (d) is self-evident and accepted by the arbitrators as well as the Umpire.

Who can deny the reasonableness of the statement (maxim c) that workmen should be regarded as equal owners with the shareholders? If conflict between capital and labour is to be avoided, as I believe it can and must be, labour should have the same status and dignity as capital. Why should a million rupees put together be more than a million men or women put together? Are they not infinitely more than metal, white or yellow? Or should holders of metal always assume that labour cannot be organized and put together as metal can? For the past eighteen years, consciously or unconsciously, capital and labour have acted in Ahmedabad on the assumption that there is no inherent conflict between the two. It is true that peace between the two has been precarious. But it has been so because the parties have not recognized the full validity of the maxims as the conditions of an abiding peace.

If then labourers are co-equal owners, their organization should have the same access to the transactions of mills as the shareholders. Indeed there can be no confidence on the part of labour if material information is withheld from it.

The last maxim admits of no weakening. If the Labour Union is regarded as a desirable organization as much as is the Mill-owners', and is not merely tolerated as a necessary evil, it follows that there should be an

agreed register of available hands and that the Mill-owners should not accept or engage any person outside the Labour Union.

Thus it seems to me that the maxims are not visionary, but on examination they are found to be absolutely essential to the healthy existence or growth of the great industry in whose interest they have been humbly suggested.

It need not be stated that the list submitted is by no means exhaustive. I must suggest some more, when I am able to revert to the question.

Harijan, 13-2-'37

52

NON-VIOLENCE THE ONLY INSURANCE

A group of students, holding University degrees, who had decided to devote themselves to the cause of labour, were on a brief visit to Wardha on their way back from Ahmedabad where they had been to receive practical training in the organization of labour. Gandhiji gladly gave them time and talked to them on the various questions they raised. He explained to them how almost since the beginning of his public life in South Africa he had been closely associated with labour. When he settled down to practise at the bar in South Africa he decided to give the whole of his spare time to work for the Indian settlers there, and the first man who came to him for assistance was an indentured labourer. This case at once put him in touch with labour. The labourers brought to him their troubles with their employers and also their personal and domestic worries, and that gave him a glimpse into their lives as nothing else could have done. Non-violence was the first thing he placed before them, and non-violence was the only thing that they had been pledged to observe when, at a critical stage in the Satyagraha campaign, nearly 60,000 labourers downed their tools and faced imprisonment. They went through untold hardship, suffering,

starvation, and some even died, but they adhered to non-violence until the end. Their condition was particularly difficult and in a sense worse than the workers here. They were not free, but indentured, and they had to fight not only for justice from their employers but for the abolition of the opprobrious £3 tax which threatened them with extinction. But non-violence helped them to pull through. His work in Champaran and Ahmedabad was recent history. Regarding Champaran he said that the condition of the peasants there was almost the same as the indentured labourers, and that they had failed in their agitation for nearly half a century for there was no cohesive power of non-violence to hold them together. There had been several riots and their condition had grown worse every year. But the first taste of non-violence breathed new life into them, and at the end of a remarkably brief struggle they were emancipated.

Without that necessary discipline in non-violence, they would have internecine strife, and would never be ready to develop the strength that is needed to enable them to realize the power that they possess. Organization, technical skill, and everything else would follow the acceptance of the fundamental principle of non-violence. Class collaboration would also follow as a matter of course. They are strong in numbers and yet they feel so dependent, so very much at the mercy of their employers. That is because they do not know their own inherent strength. Otherwise what is there to prevent them from pooling their own resources and dictate terms as employers do now? The thing that they have to realize is that labour is as much capital as metal. That realization can come only through acceptance of non-violence.

But after that realization has come, and they have come to their own, non-violence does not become superfluous. If they were to bid goodbye to it, they would be as bad as capitalists and turn exploiters themselves. The realization of their strength combined with adherence to non-violence would enable them to co-operate with capital and turn it to proper use. Then they will not regard it

as a conflicting interest, they will not regard the mill and the machinery as belonging to the exploiting agents and grinding them down but as their own instruments of production and will therefore protect them as well as they would their own property. They will not steal time and turn out less work, but will put in the most they can. In fact, capital and labour will be mutual trustees, and both will be trustees of consumers. The trusteeship theory is not unilateral, and does not in the least imply superiority of the trustee. It is, as I have shown, a perfectly mutual affair, and each believes that his own interest is best safeguarded by safeguarding the interest of the other. 'May you propitiate the gods and may the gods propitiate you, and may you reach the highest good by this mutual propitiation', says the *Bhagavadgita*. There is no separate species called gods in the universe, but all who have the power of production and will work for the community using that power are gods — labourers no less than capitalists.

Harijan, 25-6-'38

LABOUR MUST UNITE

Gandhiji said a few words to the workmen in the working-men's locality in Motiaburz. He hoped that there was no distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims in labour. They were all labourers. If the communal canker entered the labour ranks, both would weaken labour and therefore, themselves and the country. Labour, because it chose to remain unintelligent, either became subservient or insolently believed in damaging capitalists' goods and machinery or even in killing capitalists. He was a labourer by conviction and a *bhangi*. As such his interests were bound with those of labour. Therefore, he wished to tell them that violence would never save them.

What he had been saying for years was that labour was far superior to capital. Without labour gold, silver and copper were a useless burden. He could quite conceive labour existing without metal. Labour was priceless, not gold. He wanted marriage between capital and labour. They could work wonders in co-operation. But that could happen only when labour was intelligent enough to co-operate with itself and then offer co-operation with capital on terms of honourable equality. Capital controlled labour because it knew the art of combination. Drops in separation could only fade away ; drops in co-operation made the ocean which carried on its broad bosom ocean greyhounds. Similarly, if all the labourers in any part of the world combined together, they could not be tempted by higher wages or helplessly allow themselves to be attracted for, say, a pittance. A true and non-violent combination of labour would act like a magnet attracting to it all the needed capital. Capitalists would then exist only as trustees. When that happy day dawned, there would be no difference between capital and labour. Then labour will have ample food, good and sanitary dwellings, all the necessary education for their children, ample leisure for self-education and proper medical assistance.

Harijan, 7-9-'47

CLERKS *v.* WORKINGMEN

Sheth Ranchhodlal Amritlal has sent me the following scheme of industrial insurance for clerks :

"Workingmen's condition, their wages, their needs, etc. are a constant subject of enquiry in these days in this as well as in foreign countries, but no one seems to take interest in the welfare of the clerks supposed to belong to the middle classes. These clerks are considerably worse off than workingmen. In a family of four to six members there is only one wage-earner who starts life with 30 rupees a month and ends with 60. Much of his misfortune is due to the social status of which he is the victim. On the death of the single bread-winner his wife and children are reduced to a plight very near starvation. To say nothing of his ever becoming rich, the clerk's life is one long-drawn-out agony of anxiety as to how to keep body and soul together. A trifling increment of Rs 2 or Rs 3 tempts him to change masters now and then, and he hardly has a record of long unbroken service in one firm.

"The following measures are suggested for the betterment of the clerks' lot:

1. Service to be as permanent as possible.
2. Cheap grain and cloth shops to be provided by the employers.
3. Free medical aid.
4. Houses at cheap rent.
5. Provision of education for their children.
6. Loans at moderate rates of interest.
7. Insurance schemes making provision for dependents after the death of the employee.

"The first six would seem to be eminently easy to introduce, but the seventh should be also no less easy and beneficial. The Ahmedabad New Cotton Mill is seriously considering the scheme and a concrete step is likely to be taken immediately.

"The industrial insurance scheme would seem to be very effective. Under it every clerk of the mill would have his life insured for Rs 1,500, trifling fractions of the monthly salary being charged as premium, somewhat as under :

"No premium for clerks drawing under Rs 50 per month.
For those drawing Rs 51 to 75 Re 0-15-0 p.m.
For those drawing Rs 76 to 100 Re 1-6-0 p.m.
For those drawing Rs 101 to 150 Re 1-8-0 p.m.
For those drawing Rs 151 to 250 Rs 2-0-0 p.m.
For those drawing over Rs 251 Rs 2-4-0 p.m.

"In addition to this the mill will pay a bonus of Rs 1,200 annually which will be distributed to the members of the family of the clerk deceased during the year. It has been ascertained that the average annual mortality is 1 among 60, so that each deceased's family is likely to get an extra Rs 1,200. How this sum is to be utilized and distributed to the members of the deceased's family will be decided by the Insurance Board, but in no case will any part of it be permitted to be applied to *post mortem* dinner or other questionable expenses.

"I hope all the mills in the country will follow suit."

I understand little of insurance, but I take it that in this age of insurance any scheme of industrial insurance devised for the benefit of the clerical workers would be to their good. Only an insurance expert can offer helpful criticism of the scheme, and I take it that Shri Ranchhodbhai has framed the scheme in consultation with some large-hearted expert.

There cannot be two opinions as to the fact that mill-owners, no less than other business and commercial firms, ought to take a parental interest in the welfare of their employees. The relations between the employer and the employee have been up to now merely those of master and servant, they should be of father and children. I therefore welcome the scheme.

Medical relief should not, in my opinion, be free. It should be genuine, prompt and cheap. Free aid is likely to undermine their independent spirit. Some times free aid is rendered perfunctorily and sometimes it is abused, from both of which evils the clerks should be saved.

The main grievance of the clerk and the workingman is low pay and indifference to his welfare. The measures suggested in the scheme will be a direct and simple redress of the grievance, and I welcome them.

The condition of clerks is in certain respects, undoubtedly much more pitiable. I have a vivid picture of their condition before my mind. It was given to me in 1915 in Calcutta by the Marwadi Clerks' Association. It was a tragic tale of their helplessness. The number of clerks is small, their power of endurance and their capacity for union is feeble. Whereas the clerk is the only earning

member of his family, practically all the members of the workingman's family are wage-earners. The clerks must bestir themselves to improve their own condition. They must unite and must educate their dependents, especially their wives, to engage in some gainful occupation. They have lost all self-confidence and are helpless. Those who are honest, competent in their work, conscientious and hard-working need not despair of finding a suitable situation.

True social economics will teach us that the workingman, the clerk and the employer are parts of the same indivisible organism. None is smaller or greater than the other. Their interests should be not conflicting but identical and interdependent.

(Translated from the Gujarati *Navajivan*)

Young India, 3-5-'28

55

WHOSE NEED?

The institution of domestic servants is an old one. But the attitude of master towards servant has changed from time to time. Some regard servants as members of the family whereas others look upon them as slaves or chattels. Between these two extreme views may be summed up the attitude of society in general towards servants. Nowadays servants are in great demand everywhere. They have become conscious of their value and naturally demand their own conditions of pay and service. This would be proper if it were invariably coupled with a proper understanding and performance of their duty. In that event they would cease to be servants and would earn for themselves the status of members of the family. The belief in the efficacy of violence is, however, in the air. How then can servants properly win the status of members of their masters' families? That is a question that may well be asked.

I hold that a man who desires the co-operation of and wishes to co-operate with others should not be dependent on servants. If any one has to have one at a time of scarcity of servants, he will have to pay what is demanded and accept all other conditions with the result that he will, instead of being master, become the servant of his employee. This is good for neither the master nor the servant. But if what an individual seeks is not slavery but the co-operation of a fellow being he will not only serve himself but also him whose co-operation he needs. Through the extension of this principle a man's family will become coterminous with the world and his attitude towards his fellow beings will also undergo a corresponding change. There is no other way of reaching the desired consummation.

He who wants to act on this principle will be content to start with small beginnings. In spite of a man's ability to command the co-operation of thousands he must have sufficient self-restraint and self-respect in him to enable him to stand alone. Such a person will never dream of looking on any person as his menial and try to keep him under subjugation. In fact he will forget altogether that he is master of his servants and will try his best to bring them to his level. In other words he should be content to do without what others cannot have.

Poona, 1-3-'46

Harijan, 10-3-'46

56

THIEVING

Q. What is the employer to do when an employee of his is addicted to stealing and is not amenable to correction whether it is by way of entreaty or the cane ?

A. It may well be that the others too are addicts though they may not be found out. Observation would show that we are all thieves, the difference being that most of us are tolerant towards ourselves and intolerant towards those that are found out and are not of the ordinary run. What is a man, if he is not a thief, who openly charges as much as he can for the goods he sells ? If the reply be that the buyer is a willing dupe, it begs the question. In reality the buyer is helpless rather than willing. The stealing referred to is one of the symptoms of a deep-seated disease of society. It is symptomatic of the eternal strife between the moneyed few and the many paupers. Therefore, my advice to the employer will be to remove all temptations in the way of the thief, to treat him as if he was his own brother and, when he refuses to yield to any treatment, however humanitarian it may be, to ask him to go his way. Let the employer always ask himself whether he would treat his own brother in the same way at the given stage.

Panchgani, 14-7-'46

Harijan, 21-7-'46

SECTION SEVEN : STRIKES

57

STRIKES

Strikes are the order of the day. They are a symptom of the existing unrest. All kinds of vague ideas are floating in the air. A vague hope inspires all, and great will be the disappointment if that vague hope does not take definite shape. The labour world in India, as elsewhere, is at the mercy of those who set up as advisers and guides. The latter are not always scrupulous, and not always wise even when they are scrupulous. The labourers are dissatisfied with their lot. They have every reason for dissatisfaction. They are being taught, and justly, to regard themselves as being chiefly instrumental in enriching their employers. And so it requires little effort to make them lay down their tools. The political situation too is beginning to affect the labourers of India. And there are not wanting labour leaders who consider that strikes may be engineered for political purposes.

In my opinion, it will be a most serious mistake to make use of labour strikes for such a purpose. I don't deny that such strikes can serve political ends. But they do not fall within the plan of non-violent non-co-operation. It does not require much effort of the intellect to perceive that it is a most dangerous thing to make political use of labour until labourers understand the political condition of the country and are prepared to work for the common good. This is hardly to be expected of them all of a sudden and until they have bettered their own condition so as to enable them to keep body and soul together in a decent manner. The greatest political contribution, therefore, that labourers can make is to improve their own condition,

to become better informed, to insist on their rights, and even to demand proper use by their employers of the manufactures in which they have had such an important hand. The proper evolution, therefore, would be for the labourers to raise themselves to the status of part proprietors. Strikes, therefore, for the present should only take place for the direct betterment of the labourers' lot, and, when they have acquired the spirit of patriotism, for the regulation of prices of their manufactures.

The conditions of a successful strike are simple. And when they are fulfilled, a strike need never fail :

(1) The cause of the strike must be just.

(2) There should be practical unanimity among the strikers.

(3) There should be no violence used against non-strikers.

(4) Strikers should be able to maintain themselves during the strike period without falling back upon Union funds and should therefore occupy themselves in some useful and productive temporary occupation.

(5) A strike is no remedy when there is enough other labour to replace strikers. In that case, in the event of unjust treatment or inadequate wages or the like, resignation is the remedy.

(6) Successful strikes have taken place even when all the above conditions have not been fulfilled, but that merely proves that the employers were weak and had a guilty conscience. We often make terrible mistakes by copying bad examples. The safest thing is not to copy examples of which we have rarely complete knowledge but to follow the conditions which we know and recognize to be essential for success.

Young India, 16-2-'21

ON STRIKES

The Assam Bengal Railway and the steamer strikes were out of the ordinary, the first attempt, as I have found, to have strikes out of sympathy for those outside labour unions. The strikes were, therefore, sympathetic, humanitarian or political. I had the pleasure of meeting the strikers all over the railway line, but specially in Gauhati, Chittagong and Barisal. Having talked to them freely, I have come to the conclusion that the people did not fully realize the cost of their undertaking. But having embarked on the strike, they have endeavoured to suffer the consequence. It is always dangerous and uncharitable for an outsider to say, what he would have done if he had the handling of a situation. But if one may hazard an opinion, I think that the labourers were not ready for a philanthropic strike. In my opinion the labourers and artisans of India have not yet arrived at that degree of national consciousness which is necessary for successful sympathetic strikes. The fault is ours. We, who have interested ourselves in national service, have not, until recently, studied the wants and aspirations of these classes, nor taken the trouble of informing them of the political situation. We have hitherto believed that only those who had passed through high schools and colleges were fit to take part in national work. It is hardly therefore proper to expect the labouring and the artisan class all of a sudden to appreciate and sacrifice themselves for interests outside their own. We may not exploit them for political or any other ends. The best service we can render them and take from them at the present stage is to teach them self-help, to give them an idea of their own duties and rights, and put them in a position to secure redress of their own just grievances. Then and not till then are they ready for political, national or humanitarian service.

Any premature precipitation of sympathetic strikes must, therefore, result in infinite harm to our cause. In the programme of non-violence, we must readily exclude the idea of gaining anything by embarrassing the Government. If our activity is pure and that of the Government is impure, the latter is embarrassed by our purity, if it does not itself become pure. Thus, a movement of purification benefits both parties. Whereas a movement of mere destruction leaves the destroyer unpurified, and brings him down to the level of those whom he seeks to destroy.

Even our sympathetic strikes, therefore, have to be strikes for self-purification, i.e. non-co-operation. And so, when we declare a strike to redress a wrong, we really cease to take part in the wrong, and thus leave the wrong-doer to his own resources ; in other words, enable him to see the folly of continuing the wrong. Such a strike can only succeed when behind it is the fixed determination not to revert to service.

Speaking, therefore, as one having handled large successful strikes, I repeat the following maxims, already stated in these pages, for the guidance of all strike leaders :

(1) There should be no strike without a real grievance.

(2) There should be no strike if the persons concerned are not able to support themselves out of their own savings or by engaging in some temporary occupation such as carding, spinning and weaving. Strikers should never depend upon public subscriptions or other charity.

(3) Strikers must fix an unalterable minimum demand and declare it before embarking upon their strike.

A strike may fail in spite of a just grievance and the ability of strikers to hold out indefinitely, if there are workers to replace them. A wise man, therefore, will not strike for increase of wages or other comforts, if he feels that he can be easily replaced. But a philanthropic or patriotic man will strike in spite of supply being greater than the demand, when he feels for and wishes to associate himself with his neighbour's distress. Needless to

say there is no room in a civil strike of the nature described by me, for violence in the shape of intimidation, incendiarism or otherwise. I should, therefore, be extremely sorry to find, that the recent derailment near Chittagong was due to mischief done by any of the strikers. Judging by the tests suggested by me, it is clear that the friends of the strikers should never have advised them to apply for or receive Congress or any other public funds for their support. The value of the strikers' sympathy was diminished to the extent, that they received or accepted financial aid. The merit of a sympathetic strike lies in the inconvenience and loss suffered by the sympathizers.

As to what should be done now for or by the strikers, who have, in spite of threats and temptations, manfully held out — and they are more than 50 per cent — I have already given my opinion to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. And by that I wish to abide. If the strikers struck on the sole issue of sympathy for the outraged coolies at Chandpur and without intimidating their brethren, they had every moral right to do so, and they showed an unexpected measure of patriotism and fellow-feeling. I hope that they will refuse to join service, until the Government have fully and frankly apologized, and refunded to the parties concerned the moneys paid for the repatriation of the coolies.

Young India, 22-9-'21

59

THE AHMEDABAD FAST

[The following was written by Gandhiji in reply to a question regarding his fast in connection with the Ahmedabad mill-strike of 1917.

— Ed.]

My fast in Ahmedabad in connection with the mill-strike of 1917 was against 'lovers' — the mill-hands, and not against the owners — 'the tyrants'. I announced at the time that my fast was not flawless, because it was bound to influence the mill-owners who were personal friends. But it was not possible for me unconcerned to see the mill-hands, my associates, committing a breach of a vow, solemnly repeated by them in my presence for twenty-one days. The effect of the fast was electrical. The wavering labourers became at once strong in their determination.

Young India, 31-7-'24

60

CONDITIONS OF A PACIFIC STRIKE

A friend sends me an extract from *No More War*, an organ of the British Pacifists. I copy from the extract the following conditions. Mr A. Fenner Brockway lays down as a test of a pacific strike :

"1. A strike in protest of social evils which destroy human life can be as much an act of pacifism as a strike against war. (Starvation wages kill as many human beings as are killed by guns.)

2. If it be said that "constitutional" means could be used to end these evils, the same can be said of war. Our "constitutional" machinery is inadequate. The voters two years ago had neither wage reductions nor war in mind.

3. If it be said that a strike (and particularly a general strike) against wage reduction is an effort to "coerce" the nation or the Government, the same can be said about a general strike against war. As a matter of fact, neither has any promise of success unless the greater part of the nation supports it.

4. It is not accurate to liken a strike to an economic blockade. So far as there is danger of hunger, it would be the strikers themselves who would suffer first. In actual fact, in the recent General Strike the T. U. C. (Trade Union Congress) was prepared to co-operate in maintaining life and health. The Government refused co-operation.

5. *The determining factor as to whether a strike is pacifist or not* is the spirit from which it springs. A strike against war in which the motive was hatred of members of Government rather than of war and which presented a spirit which might be transformed to civil war, would not be an act of pacifism, nor would a strike against wage reductions animated by hatred of the employers or of members of the Government, or by anti-social feeling. But both are acts of pacifism when inspired by the spirit of protest against the evils themselves.

6. Whilst it is admitted that a non-pacifist spirit occasionally showed itself in the utterances, and still more rarely in the acts of strikers, I have not the least hesitation in saying that the dominant motive in the Great Strike was that of self-sacrificing moral protest and not anti-social force or personal hatred. It was this which gave it spiritual power; in this the secret of the wonderful self-discipline of the men was to be found.

A pacifism which can only see the cruelties of occasional military warfare and is blind to the continuous cruelties of our social system is worthless. Unless our pacifism finds expression in the broad human movement which is seeking not merely the end of war, but our equally non-pacifist civilization as a whole, it will be of little account in the onward march of mankind. The spirit of life will sweep on, quite uninfluenced by it.

The No More War Movement will fulfil its purpose just in so far as it recognizes this."

I would only add to these admirable conditions one more test. A pacific strike must be limited to those who are labouring under the grievance to be redressed. Thus if the match manufacturers, say, of Timbuctoo, who are quite satisfied with their lot, strike out of sympathy for its mill-hands who are getting starvation wages, the match manufacturers' strike would be a species of violence. They may and should help in a most effective manner by withdrawing their custom from the mill-owners of Timbuctoo without laying themselves open to the charge of violence. But it is possible to conceive occasions when those who are not directly suffering may be under an obligation to cease work. Thus, if in the instance imagined, the masters in

the match-factory combine with the mill-owners of Timbuctoo, it will clearly be the duty of the workers in the match-factory to make common cause with the mill-hands. But I have suggested the addition purely by way of illustration. In the last resort every case has to be judged on its own merits. Violence is a subtle force. It is not easy always to detect its presence though you may feel it all the same.

Young India, 18-11-'26

61

STORM SIGNALS

The Sholapur affairs and the labour unrest in Kanpur and Ahmedabad show how uncertain is the Congress control over forces of disorder. Tribes called criminal cannot be dealt with radically differently from the past practice without ascertaining how they will behave. One difference can certainly be made at once. They may not be treated as criminals to be dreaded and shunned, but efforts should be made to brother them and bring them under the national influence. Why have Congressmen been unable to reach these tribes and make them proof against the blandishment of those who would exploit their traditional violent tendencies, so-called or real ?

Why are we living in Ahmedabad and Kanpur in perpetual dread of lightning or unauthorized strikes ? Is the Congress unable to influence organized labour in the right direction ? We may not distrust Government notices issued in the provinces administered by Congress Ministers. It will not do to belittle their notices as we used to treat the irresponsible Government's notices. If we distrust Congress Ministers or are dissatisfied with them, they can be dismissed without ceremony. But while they are permitted to remain in office, their notices and appeals should receive the full-hearted support of all Congressmen.

On no other condition can the holding of offices by Congressmen be justified. If in spite of honest effort by Congressmen, forces of disorder cannot be brought under control without the assistance of the police and the military, in my opinion, acceptance by the Congress of the burden of office loses all force and meaning, and the sooner the Ministers are withdrawn, the better it would be for the Congress and its struggle to achieve complete independence.

My hope is that the outbreak in the Sholapur Settlement and the labour unrest in Ahmedabad and Kanpur are symptoms of the exaggerated expectations of radical betterment of the condition of labour and even of the so-called criminal tribes. Then the Congress should have no difficulty in checking disorders. If, on the contrary, they are signs of weakness of Congress control, the whole situation arising out of acceptance of office by Congressmen requires reviewing.

Harijan, 20-11-'37

62

AUTHORIZED AND UNAUTHORIZED STRIKES

Q. In your leading article of March 30, you have hoped that passive Satyagrahis will not interfere with the course of the struggle by "precipitating strikes of labourers". There is just this cryptic word "precipitating" and nothing more. When I read it first, I did not particularly notice it. But I had to do a lot of explaining later. Unless a very careful reader or one trained to understand your way of thought and expression, one is likely to go astray. One may miss the force of the word *precipitating* and understand it as if you frowned upon all strikes of labourers.

With the recent Ahmedabad fight for a war bonus, no one would be entitled to regard you as an opponent of labourers' strikes as such. The strike in Ahmedabad was indeed averted, but you had approved of it and the workers

realized their demands. The work in Ahmedabad was done methodically. There was proper presentation and working out of labour's demands, completing of arbitration, full notice and balloting of the over hundred thousand votes on the question of the strike. I believe that, if after such methodical work a strike cannot be averted, you will approve of it and only assure yourself that there is no violence.

A. You are right. I consider myself to be an expert in organized strikes. My first successful attempt was made in South Africa under most adverse circumstances. I improved the technique in Ahmedabad. I do not claim to have reached perfection. I know that strikes can be made irresistible. I have discountenanced only unauthorized strikes. The Congress has not gained control over labour. Some Congressmen have. Almost all the strike leaders have their own methods. All of them are not non-violent. Some are ruled by selfish considerations. Some others are unscrupulous. What I, therefore, ask for is at least passive, if not active, co-operation. I shall not need strikes for the purpose of the struggle. What shape mass civil disobedience will take, if it ever comes, I cannot say. But I can say what it will never do if I have anything to do with it. I know that, if the Congress had non-violent control over all labour in India, the Congress could become far more powerful than it is today. That control will come when the Congress has one policy about labour and has enough workers to give effect to it.

Harijan, 20-4-'40

63

CONFLICT OF IDEALS

> "She was unable to understand Gandhiji calling upon R. I. N. ratings to resign if their condition was humiliating. If they did that they would have to give up their only means of livelihood. Moreover, they were fighting for principles. If they resigned now there would be hundreds in these days of unemployment to take their places who would be subject to the same discrimination and treatment and the R. I. N. ratings would not have achieved anything. It simply does not lie in the mouth of Congressmen who were themselves going to the legislatures to ask the ratings to give up their jobs. It does not help the cause of the country at all."

Every one of the statements quoted above from Arunabehn's Press interview is contrary to the views generally held by or attributed to Congressmen. Whether she really holds or does not hold the views put into her mouth is irrelevant here. For the moment it is enough to examine them on their merits and to show that they are wholly inconsistent with Congress resolutions.

The first principle of non-violent action as propounded in the Congress resolution of 1920 at its special session in Calcutta under the late Lala Lajpatrai is that of non-co-operation with everything humiliating. It must be remembered that the R. I. N. was founded not for the benefit of the ruled. The men went with their eyes open. Discrimination stares one in the face. It cannot be avoided if one enters the service which is frankly organized to keep India under subjection. One may, one ought to, try to mend the conditions. That is possible only up to a point. That cannot be achieved through mutiny. Mutiny may conceivably succeed but the success can only avail the mutineers and their kin, not the whole of India. And the lesson would be a bad inheritance. Discipline will be at least as necessary under Swaraj as it is now. India under successful mutineers would be cut up into warring factions exhausted by internecine strife.

India of the Congress has made little headway in the appreciation of the fight for Swaraj, if it is true that hundreds would take their places if the present ratings resigned in pursuance of their campaign against humiliation. Can we have Swaraj for the masses if we are so degraded that hundreds of us are ready to swallow humiliation even to the extent of taking the places of humiliated fellowmen? The very thought is unworthy of Congressmen and that too at the moment when Swaraj is believed to be within sight.

Those who hold that enlistment in the R. I. N. is their only means of livelihood must have a very poor opinion of them. A soldier's is a hard life. He is disciplined to work in co-operation and trained to work with the pickaxe and the spade. Such a one will disdain to think that apart from soldiering he has no means of livelihood. We have a poor opinion of soldiers, if we think that they cannot earn their bread by the sweat of the brow. A labourer is any day worthy of his hire. What is, however, true is that a soldier out of his calling will lack the glamour and the amenities provided for him. We have wasted precious twenty-five years if we have not yet stripped the profession of killing and destroying of the thick coat of varnish that has covered it for so long.

Aruna Asaf Ali has been reported to have said that the ratings would have gained nothing by resigning. Well, they would have gained honour and dignity if they had manfully given up their job and taught the citizens of Bombay the way to save honour and dignity, and they would have spared Bombay the senseless destruction of life, property and very precious foodstuffs. Surely this would have been an achievement not quite beneath notice.

The last statement in the reported interview is surely a confusion of thought. Congressmen going to the legislatures for conserving the honour and liberty of the country is not the same as ratings serving for their livelihood with the possibility of being used against their own countrymen and their liberty. Congressmen who go to the legislatures are representatives elected by their voters and

they go even if it is only to prevent those from going who will misrepresent the voters. Going to the legislatures may be altogether bad, but there can be no such comparison as has been just adverted to.

Poona, 3-3-'46

Harijan, 10-3-'46

64

CAPITALISM AND STRIKES

How should capital behave when labour strikes ? This question is in the air and has great importance at the present moment. One way is that of suppression named or nicknamed 'American'. It consists in suppression of labour through organized *goondaism.* Everybody would consider this as wrong and destructive. The other way, right and honourable, consists in considering every strike on its merits and giving labour its due — not what capital considers as due but what labour itself would so consider and enlightened public opinion acclaim as just.

As time progresses, the labour world is getting more insistent in its demands which are daily increasing, and it does not hesitate to resort to violence in its impatient enforcement of those demands. New methods of enforcing them are being employed. Workers do not hesitate to injure the property of the employers, dislocate machinery, harass old men and women who would not join the strike and forcibly keep out blacklegs. In these circumstances, how are the employers to behave ?

My advice to the employers would be that they should willingly regard workers as the real owners of the concerns which they fancy they have created. They should further regard it as their duty to equip the employees with sound education that would draw out the intelligence dormant in them and gladly promote and welcome the power that this combination of the workers gives them.

This noble work cannot be done in a day by the employers. Meanwhile, what should those do who have to face the destruction wrought by strikers in their concerns ? I would unhesitatingly advise such employers that they should at once offer the strikers full control of the concern which is as much the strikers' as theirs. They will vacate their premises not in a huff but because it is right, and to show their goodwill they would offer the employees the assistance of their engineers and other skilled staff. The employers will find in the end that they will lose nothing. Indeed their right action will disarm opposition and they will earn the blessings of their men. They will have made proper use of their capital. I would not consider such action as benevolent. It would be an intelligent use by the capitalists of their resources and honest dealing in regard to the employees whom they would have converted into honourable partners.

Uruli, 23-3-'46

Harijan, 31-3-'46

65

SPORADIC STRIKES

Q. When sporadic strikes are such as cannot be supported by the Congress, what should Congressmen and the public do to put an end to them ?

A. In the first place, if the Congress organization were complete there would be no sporadic strikes and any other strike would be unjustified for the simple reason that a people's organization must shoulder the burden of every justifiable strike within the sphere of that organization. But today unhappily the Congress, powerful as it is, has not attained that supreme position. Hence every sporadic strike has to be judged on merits irrespective of the party that has made itself responsible for it. And when a strike is indefensible on merits the Congress and the

public should unequivocally condemn it. The natural result would be that the men on strike would go back to work. If the strike is justified the institution against which it has been declared would be likewise condemned if it employs blacklegs or other questionable means to force strikers into submission.

Uruli, 23-3-'46

Harijan, 31-3-'46

66

PEACEFUL STRIKES

Q. How should a strike be conducted so that hooliganism and violence are avoided ?

A. A strike should be spontaneous and not manipulated. If it is organized without any compulsion there would be no chance for *goondaism* and looting. Such a strike would be characterized by perfect co-operation amongst the strikers. It should be peaceful and there should be no show of force. The strikers should take up some work either singly or in co-operation with each other, in order to earn their bread. The nature of such work should have been thought out beforehand. It goes without saying that in a peaceful, effective and firm strike of this character, there will be no room for rowdyism or looting. I have known of such strikes. I have not presented a Utopian picture.

New Delhi, 26-5-'46

Harijan, 2-6-'46

67

A NON-VIOLENT STRIKE

The fundamental reason for this spreading strike fever is that life here as elsewhere, is today uprooted from its basis, the basis of religion, and what an English writer has called 'cash nexus' has taken its place. And that is a precarious bond. But even when the religious basis is there, there will be strikes, because it is scarcely conceivable that religion will have become for all the basis of life. So, there will be attempts at exploitation on the one hand, and strikes on the other. But these strikes will then be of a purely non-violent character. Such strikes never do harm to any one. It was such a strike perhaps that brought General Smuts to his knees. "If you had hurt an Englishman," said Jan Smuts, "I would have shot you, even deported your people. As it is, I have put you in prison and tried to subdue you and your people in every way. But how long can I go on like this when you do not retaliate?" And so he had to come to terms with a mere coolie on behalf of coolies as all Indians were then called in South Africa.

Harijan, 22-9-'46

68

SWEEPERS' STRIKE

There are certain matters in which strikes would be wrong. Sweepers' grievances come in this category. I do not want to go into others here. My opinion against sweepers' strikes dates back to about 1897 when I was in Durban. A general strike was mooted there and the question arose as to whether scavengers should join in it. My vote was registered against the proposal. Just as man can not live without air so too he cannot exist for long if his home and surroundings are not clean. One or other epidemic is bound to break out especially when modern drainage is put out of action.

Therefore I was perturbed when I read about the

sweepers' strike in Bombay. Fortunately it has come to an end. I understand, however, that the sweepers, both men and women, refusd to submit their case to arbitration.

In spite of my close attachment to sweepers, better because of it, I must denounce the coercive methods they are said to have employed. They will thereby be losers in the long run. City folk will not always be cowed down. If they were, it would mean the collapse of municipal administration. Coercion cannot but result in the end in chaos. An impartial tribunal for settling disputes should always be accepted. Refusal is a sign of weakness. A *bhangi* may not give up his work even for a day. And there are many other ways open to him of securing justice.

Townspeople should, on the other hand, forget that there is such a thing as untouchability and learn the art of cleaning their own and the city's drains, so that if a similar occasion arises they are not non-plussed and can render the necessary temporary service. They may not be coerced. I go so far as to say that the military who know this work should be used for such emergency. If Swaraj is round the bend, we can now look upon the military as ours and need have no hesitation in taking all the constructive work we can from them. Up till now they have only been employed in indiscriminate firing on us. Today they must plough the land, dig wells, clean latrines and do every other constructive work that they can, and thus turn the people's hatred of them into love.

Now that the *hartal* is at an end, it is the duty of every one to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the *bhangis*, educate them, see that they are properly housed, permit them, like anyone else, to live wherever they choose, look in the matter of an equitable wage for them and see that justice is meted out to them without their having to demand it. If this is done throughout India we shall definitely prove ourselves worthy of Swaraj and be able also to maintain it.

New Delhi, 15-4-'46

Harijan, 21-4-'46

69

A HARIJAN'S LETTER

A Harijan friend complains bitterly about my article on sweepers' strike.

His first complaint is that I have given up the sweet name *Harijan* and used *bhangi* instead. The criticism shows the sensitive nature of the correspondent. It was a Gujarati 'untouchable', in the first instance, who suggested the name 'Harijan' to me and I willingly adopted it. This does not, however, mean that a current word for any sub-caste may never be used. I count myself a Harijan and it pleases me to call myself a *bhangi* among them, because that is the lowest caste of Harijans. When I stayed recently in the sweepers' quarters in Delhi, the Harijans there too complained against the use of the word *bhangi*. They suggested *mehtar*. I tried to make them understand that it mattered little as to which of the current words was used for the same occupation. In spite of being considered the lowest occupation, it was in fact the highest, inasmuch as it protected health and they should be indifferent to the name. Whatever the origin of the word may be, *bhangi* is, in my opinion, another name for Shivji. Whether you call a sweeper a *mehtar* or a *bhangi*, like Shivji he brings health to man. The one brings it by keeping the home clean, the other cleanses the mind of man.

The second criticism is more serious. Prejudices are responsible for misunderstandings. If we take by force even that to which we are entitled, the action is likely to lead to a quarrel. We may not even be able to digest what we get by force. The strikers got what they did by coercion. At least, that is my belief. If my occupation is to keep latrines clean and I refused to do the work, can it be termed anything other than coercion ? Of course, I am not bound to take up the job of cleaning latrines and I may be said to have every right to lay down my conditions of service. But according to my way of thinking, the laying

down of conditions is not an absolute right. Even if such an absolute right would be permitted, it might not be proper to use it under certain circumstances. But I do not want to enter into the justification of this reasoning. I tried to show in my article the duties of *bhangis* as well as of citizens. I have often said that every kind of injustice is meted out to *bhangis.* I have no doubt that citizens do not fulfil their obligations to them. Thus it is their duty to see that Harijan dwellings are built properly, the means employed for cleaning are decent ; that they have a special working uniform given to them ; that they and their children have facilities for education etc. These and other problems should be solved without loss of time. The *bhangis* may not go on strike for lack of these amenities but it is up to all citizens to raise their voice on behalf of them.

Yet another criticism is directed against my suggestion of the use of the military to do sweepers' work. I do not see any wrong in what I said. I have re-read my article and am not willing to withdraw one single word of it. I do not regret having written as I did. I advise Harijan friends to read it in the proper spirit. If they do so, they will see that my feelings on their behalf have undergone no change.

Simla, 5-5-'46

Harijan, 12-5-'46

70

SCAVENGERS' LOT

Q. You have doubtless written on this subject before but I would like you to say a word again in regard to the duty of municipal and other authorities as well as private employers in the matter of providing *bhangis* with the proper means of scavenging. Unless water-tight iron pails are provided, for example, the drippings during the rainy season, through baskets or gunny bags, fall on the unfortunate workers. All scavenging should really be able to be done without soiling the hands or any part of the body. If this were so, the work would assume a dignity which it does not carry at the moment. Along with the supply of proper means of scavenging, sweeping etc. the *bhangi* needs instruction. It is a matter which local and provincial authorities should take up in the cause of cleanliness.

A. I would advocate bye-laws requiring authorized receptacles, brooms, etc. which would avoid physical handling of dirt and would also prescribe simple working costume. Inspectors or overseers will be trained for this humane and sanitary work instead of being expected to exact work anyhow. The result of the present system is maximum of insanitation and minimum of work plus bribery, corruption and bad manners.

New Delhi, 30-9-'46

Harijan, 6-10-'46

71

BHANGI STRIKES AGAIN

A writer, who has asked the question about the propriety of looting, asks also what the poor sweeper is to do when everything else fails. He indignantly asks :

> "Is the *bhangi* to continue his service on starvation wages, living in dirt and squalor ?"

The question is appropriate. I claim that in such cases the proper remedy is not a strike but a notice to the public in general and the employing corporation in particular that the *bhangis* must give up the sweeping service which consigns those reserved for that service to a life of starvation and all it means. There is a wide distinction between a strike and an entire discontinuation (not suspension) of service. A strike is a temporary measure in expectation of relief. Discontinuance is giving up of a particular job because there is no expectation of relief. Proper discontinuance presupposes fair notice on the one hand and prospect of better wages and freedom from squalor and dirt on the other. This will wake up society from its disgraceful slumber resulting in a proper scavenging of the overgrowth that has smothered public conscience. At a stroke the *bhangis* will raise scavenging to a fine art and give it the status it should have had long ago.

Harijan, 23-6-'46

72

STRIKES

The statement in the daily Press that I had approved of the postal strike is not true. One day a postman asked to be allowed to just say *Vande Mataram* to me. Kanu Gandhi brought him to me. The visitor, however, asked for my blessings for the postmen's strike which had just then commenced. I said to him that if the strike was justified and if they conducted themselves absolutely peacefully, they must succeed. This was no approval of the particular strike. Apart, however, from what I said and apart from the merits of the postmen's strike, I feel that as an expert in successful strikes of an absolutely peaceful nature, I owe it to the conductor of this strike as those of all others and the public to state the conditions of successful strikes.

Obviously there should be no strike which is not justifiable on merits. No unjust strike should succeed. All public sympathy must be withheld from such strikes.

The public has no means of judging the merits of a strike, unless it is backed by impartial persons enjoying public confidence. Interested men cannot judge the merits of their own case. Hence, there must be an arbitration accepted by the parties or a judicial adjudication. As a rule, the matter does not come before the public when there is accepted arbitration or adjudication. Cases have, however, happened when haughty employers have ignored awards or misguided employees, conscious of their power to assert themselves, have done likewise and have decided upon forcible extortion.

Strikes for economic betterment should never have a political end as an ulterior motive. Such a mixture never advances the political end and generally brings trouble upon strikers, even when they do not dislocate public life, as in the case of public utility services, such as the postal strike. The Government may suffer some inconvenience,

but will not come to a standstill. Rich persons will put up expensive postal services but the vast mass of the poor people will be deprived during such a strike of a convenience of primary importance to which they have become used for generations. Such strikes can only take place when every other legitimate means has been adopted and failed.

In the present case we have National Provincial Governments. Postmen should consult these Governments before resorting to the extreme step. So far as I am aware, Shri Balasaheb Kher, Shri Mangaldas Pakwasa and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel have intervened. If their advice has been rejected by the men, they have taken a serious and dangerous step. If all these powerful unions disregard their own Governments and the Working Committee members, they disown the Congress. They have a right to do so, if the Congress sells their interest.

Sympathetic strikes must be taboo until it is conclusively proved that the affected men have exhausted all the legitimate means at their disposal and until the Congress has been proved to have betrayed or neglected their interest or until the Congress has called for sympathetic strikes, in order to secure justice from obdurate and unsympathetic authorities.

One hears of strikes all over the country to paralyse the Government. This paralysis is an extreme political step, open only to a body like the Congress, not even to unions, however powerful they may be. If the Congress is the people's arm *par excellence* for the purpose of winning Independence, paralysing action should be retained solely in the hands of the Congress.

At the present moment, the Congress is engaged in making a success of the proposed Constituent Assembly. There are interminable difficulties in the way. Paralysing strikes must seriously hamper Congress action.

It follows from the foregoing that political strikes must be treated on their own merits and must never be mixed with or related to economic strikes. Political strikes have a definite place in non-violent action. They are never

taken up haphazard. They must be open, never led by *goondaism.* They are calculated never to lead to violence.

Therefore, my humble suggestion to all strikers is to make a frank declaration of submission to arbitration or adjudication, to seek the guidance of the Congress and abide by its advice and for all sympathetic strikers to stop, whilst the Congress is engaged in making the contemplated Constituent Assembly a success and while Provincial National Governments are functioning.

Uruli Kanchan, 3-8-'46

Harijan, 11-8-'46

SECTION EIGHT : PLANTATION LABOUR AND KISANS

73

RECRUITING EVIL

A correspondent from Sirsi (Canara) writes :

> " An agent of the Assam Tea Planters intends to start a depot to canvass coolies for the plantation. He does not want Mussalman coolies for they are not obedient. He wants only Hindus who are docile. He offers Rs 15 for every coolie registered. Is it not possible to stop the evil ? There are so many misrepresentations."

The evil is no doubt great. Assam is not a depopulated place. There is something wrong if labourers have to be taken all the way from Canara to Assam. It is impossible for the simple Canarese villagers to know the conditions in the Assam plantations. Freedom of contract is lost as soon as a tout intervenes whose business it is to get labour somehow or other. Let all the Canarese go to Assam if *they* wish and if they are not to displace the Assamese. But in the present case, if the facts be as stated by the correspondent, there can be no question of *wish* on the part of the Canarese and no outsider can go to Assam without displacing an Assamese. Tea plantations of Assam must be worked, if they are at all worked, by indigenous labour so long as there are poor people in Assam who are without employment.

My correspondent asks me to suggest remedies to avert the evil of recruiting. Public opinion is the most effective remedy. Let the correspondent collect sufficient workers who will make it their business during their spare hours to visit the neighbouring villages and warn the villagers against falling into traps laid for them. Some one among these workers should try to study conditions of labour in Assam either by a personal visit or from literature published on the subject.

Young India, 2-9-'26

74

THE COOLIE PROBLEM OF ASSAM

Whilst I was touring in Assam, a correspondent sent me his outpourings under the above heading. From his letter I take the following :

"The unobstrusive coolie, the poverty-stricken, drunken, illiterate outcaste of the Hindu society, is indeed presenting a baffling problem. Left to himself, he will go on, as he has gone on for the past half century and over, slaving for his master like a team-bull, dragging on a pitiful existence and drowning his sufferings in liquor. But we can no longer afford to ignore him. He has come to stay, has taken root in our soil and has multiplied so numerously as to constitute an important factor in the social, economic and political structure of the province.

"It will not do to dismiss the coolie as an outsider and treat him as a foreign element unworthy of our notice. Our indifference towards him in the past has been but a testimony to our short-sightedness. It will not do to look on with apathy at this vast mass of helpless Hindus, to whom life is but drudgery and drink and no more. The time has come when we must take a broad view of the matter and regard the coolie as a member of our own community, a permanent element of our body politic. The time really has come when we must go to him and lift the veil of ignorance from him and point the way to progress through education and industry.

"The coolies have come to Assam from almost all the provinces of India. Most of them would be regarded as untouchables in their provinces of origin. By their aloofness, their habits and customs and linguistic differences and low economic condition, they constitute a distinct class in Assam which is as bad as untouchable.

"Our activities should aim at absorption of the coolie into our society, by making him give up his unclean habits, by providing him with facilities to come more and more in touch with the indigenous people, by inducing him to adopt the religious and social customs of the Hindus, and, last but not the least, by spreading education among them.

"The coolies are hard-working. Given proper facilities, they can earn enough ; but they are much addicted to drinking. Vigorous propaganda against this drink habit must be organized.

"Although his stay in our midst is all too brief, yet, it is hoped Gandhiji will give his thoughts to the hapless coolies and see for himself the conditions in which they live. What little

time he will devote to the coolies will reveal to his vigilant eyes a world of information. Gandhiji will no doubt appreciate the many difficulties that stand in our way, the chief among these being want of funds. He will, it is hoped, evolve a scheme of work as well as devise ways and means to work it out.

"It will not be out of place to mention here many other hapless masses of people whose lot is as dark as, may be, even darker than, that of the coolies; the Miris, the Mikirs, the Nagas, etc. These also demand attention.

"I do not, however, suggest that all these depressed sections of the people of Assam should come under the purview of the Harijan Sangha. Some may not even fall within the definition of Harijan, particularly the hill tribes. But, surely, that will not shut them out from Gandhiji's consideration.

"*Note*: According to the last census, the total population of Assam Valley Division is 48,55,711, and the total coolie population is 10,50,000, including the ex-garden coolies, who, having secured their discharge from garden work, have settled down in the land with no thought of returning to their provinces of origin. There is no exact figure showing the total of these coolie settlers."

I can agree from personal experience with much of what the writer has to say. The very word *coolie* is a misnomer and reminds one of what happens in South Africa. Instead of meaning a labourer or a porter, the word comes to be applied in South Africa to designate the bearer's nationality, and becomes a word of reproach. An Indian merchant, barrister or doctor was known as a coolie merchant, etc. So, in Assam, the Indian who went from another province to work on the tea estate remained a coolie even after the termination of his contract as a labourer and even though he ceased to be a labourer and became a land-owner. But being industrious, he has multiplied in Assam and yet remains in perfect isolation and ostracism. It is suicidal policy that keeps him so. He cannot be driven out of Assam. Being grossly neglected, he has become an economic waste. If these men were properly taken care of, they would become an asset of first class importance. It is upto the educated peoples of Assam to study this problem and solve it to the benefit of all concerned. It does not require an outlay of money so much as it requires an outlay of intelligence and industry.

Harijan, 1-6-'34

75

KISANS

The programme is not exhaustive. *Swaraj* is a mighty structure. Eighty crores of hands have to work at building it. Of these, *kisans*, i.e. the peasantry, are the largest part. In fact, being the bulk of them (probably over 80 per cent) the *kisans* should be the Congress. But they are not. When they become conscious of their non-violent strength no power on earth can resist them.

They must not be used for power politics. I consider it to be contrary to the non-violent method. Those who would know my method of organizing *kisans* may profitably study the movement in Champaran when Satyagraha was tried for the first time in India with the result all India knows. It became a mass movement which remained wholly non-violent from start to finish. It affected over twenty *lakhs* of *kisans*. The struggle centred round one specific grievance which was a century old. There had been several violent revolts to get rid of the grievance. The *kisans* were suppressed. The non-violent remedy succeeded in full in six months. The *kisans* of Champaran became politically conscious without any direct effort. The tangible proof they had of the working of non-violence to remove their grievance drew them to the Congress, and led by Babu Brijkishoreprasad and Babu Rajendraprasad they gave a good account of themselves during the past civil disobedience campaigns.

The reader may also profitably study the *kisan* movements in Kheda, Bardoli and Borsad. The secret of success lies in a refusal to exploit the *kisans* for political purposes outside their own personal and felt grievances. Organization round a specific wrong they understand. They need no sermons on non-violence. Let them learn to apply non-violence as an effective remedy which they can understand, and later when they are told that the method they were applying was non-violent, they will readily recognize it as such.

From these illustrations Congressmen who care could study how work can be done for and among *kisans.* I hold that the method that some Congressmen have followed to organize *kisans* has done them no good and has probably harmed them. Anyway, they have not used the non-violent method. Be it said to the credit of some of these workers that they frankly admit that they do not believe in the non-violent method. My advice to such workers would be that they should neither use the Congress name nor work as Congressmen.

The reader will now understand why I have refrained from the competition to organize *kisans* and labour on an all-India basis. How I wish that all hands pulled in the same direction ! But perhaps in a huge country like ours it is impossible. Anyway in non-violence there is no coercion. Cold reason and demonstration of the working of non-violence must be trusted to do the work.

In my opinion, like labour, they should have under the Congress, a department working for their specific question.

Constructive Programme, item 14.

76

TO THE KISANS OF THE U. P.

During the late struggle, in some districts, the non-payment of taxes was being organized as part of civil disobedience for the attainment of *Purna Swaraj.* But by reason of the Settlement between the Congress and the Government civil disobedience was discontinued and, therefore, also the non-payment of taxes.

But there was then deep economic distress among you. Bad as your condition was even in normal times, the unprecedented fall this year in the prices of the crops usually grown by you made it infinitely worse. And Congress workers reported that many of you were utterly unable to pay in full the rents due by you. In several districts inquiries were made in a few hundred villages disclosing a

serious state of affairs. It was found that the price of your gross produce had fallen to such an extent that the sales were not enough to pay the rents. It was in this connection that I came to Nainital to see H. E. the Governor. His Excellency gave me a patient hearing and we fully discussed the situation. He was sympathetic. I told him that some Congress workers had assured me that the relief hitherto announced by the Government of the U. P. was hardly equal to the actual distress. And I submitted certain proposals which he kindly promised to consider.

I was bound meanwhile to tender you such advice as it was in my power to do. I have passed many an anxious hour discussing the situation with many co-workers. I have had the benefit of a frank and free discussion with important Talukdars who were good enough to respond to my invitation to see me. I am glad to be able to say that they were in general agreement with the proposals suggested hereunder.

Concentrated work was done in the following amongst other districts: Agra, Muttra, Allahabad, Rai Bareilly, Gorakhpur, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Partabgarh and Etavah. And for these it has been found that there should be a remission, for the year 1338 *Fasli*, of 8 annas in the rupee in the case of statutory and non-occupancy tenants and 4 annas in the case of occupancy tenants. This general formula should be subject to variation as may be required by local conditions.

I have been told that in some districts the tenants are in a position to do with less reduction. Some districts were again hard hit by local calamities. The suggested reduction would naturally therefore not apply to the districts that might be able to pay more than what is suggested here, nor to those whose condition may be under the level found in the foregoing districts. Indeed even in the districts mentioned those of you who are able to pay more ought to do so. The Congress expects every tenant to pay as early as possible all the rent he can, and in no case as a general rule less than 8 annas or 4 annas as the case may be. But just as even in the same district there may

be cases in which a larger payment is possible, it is equally possible that there may be cases in which less than 8 annas or 4 annas can only be paid. In such cases I hope the tenants will be treated liberally by the Zamindars.

In every case you will see that you get against payment a full discharge from your obligation for the current year's rent.

I understand that several tenants were ejected during the struggle and others have been ejected since. Not to restore these to their holdings would be clearly against the atmosphere sought to be created by the Settlement. I have every hope, therefore, that against payment on the scale suggested here the ejected tenants would be fully restored without any penalty.

I am hoping that payment will begin at once. It may be that you are not able to pay the full 8 annas at once. In that case I trust you will get suspension, and that no coercive process would be issued whether for the unpaid balance or for arrears, if any, till the next harvest.

I would like to suggest to the Government, in view of the loss that your inability to pay the rents in full will cause to the Zamindars, that they get a proportionate reduction in the revenue payable by them to the Government.

Lastly, let me warn you against listening to the advice, if it has reached you, that you have no need to pay to the Zamindars any rent at all. I hope that you will not listen to such advice, no matter who gives it. Congressmen cannot, we do not seek to injure the Zamindars. We aim not at destruction of property. We aim only at its lawful use.

It has been suggested that you will listen to the Congress when Congressmen tell you not to pay anything at all, but you will not listen to the Congress when it asks you to pay according to your ability. The opportunity has now come to you to falsify the calumny.

You have complained of very harsh treatment by or on behalf of some landlords. The Congress is trying and

will try to investigate all your complaints, plead with the landlords and even advise legal relief where such becomes imperative. But let it be also owned that sometimes some *kisans* too have gone astray and committed murderous assaults. These acts spoil the fair name of the *kisans*, harm their cause and impair the usefulness of the Congress for service. For in the ultimate end you are the Congress. The Congress is incomplete in so far as it represents you insufficiently.

Please remember that the Congress aims at reaching *Purna Swaraj* through truth and non-violence. And it will fail in so far as the *kisans* fail to observe these two cardinal principles. You are millions. When millions become untruthful and violent, it will mean self-destruction. You will therefore suffer injury without retaliation. You have now perhaps learnt that the best way of resisting injury is never to injure the injurer, but ever to refuse, no matter how much suffering the refusal costs us, to do his will when we know it to be wrong.

I am,
Your friend and servant,
M. K. GANDHI

Young India, 28-5-'31

TO THE U. P. ZAMINDARS

In another column * will be found my manifesto to the U. P. *kisans.* I know that H. E. the Governor does not quite like it inasmuch as it goes beyond the relief given by the U. P. Government. But the advice given to the *kisans* in the manifesto is an honest attempt to express their capacity for payment. I am hoping, therefore, that if the *kisans* pay according to the suggestions made in the manifesto, the Zamindars and the local Government will accept the payments in full discharge of the *kisans'* liability. But under the land revenue system prevalent in the U. P. the brunt will in the first instance fall upon the Zamindars. I am hoping that the Government will grant proportionate relief to the Zamindars who accept the tenants' terms.

To the Zamindars I can give my assurance, that I endeavoured to study the rural conditions as much as it was possible for me to do. With the authoritative figures before me, it was impossible to offer better terms. Here are the two tables of prices :

Index Nos. of the Prices of the Principal Foodgrains (Wheat, Barley, Gram, Rice and *Bajra*) on the basis of 1873=100.

TABLE I

Year	Prices	Year	Prices
1880	118	1906-10	195
1881-85	100	1911-15	194
1886-90	119	1916-20	272
1891-95	128	1921-25	294
1896-1900	166	1926	300
1901-05	136	1931 (May, U.P.)	132

TABLE II

Year	Price per maund in rupees	Year	Price per maund in rupees
1880	1.5	1906-10	3.56
1881-85	1.68	1911-15	3.31
1886-90	2.08	1916-20	4.63
1891-95	2.22	1921-25	4.73
1896-1900	2.75	1926-28	4.9
1901-05	2.34	1931 May	2.3

* See the previous chapter.

They show that from 1915 there is 50 per cent drop in the prices of staples. These figures go back to 1886. That means that within living memory they have never been so low as now. And if one were to go to the level of rents in those days, the tenants would have to pay much less than 8 annas or 12 annas as under the manifesto. It is admitted that the condition of the tenants has at no time been prosperous during recent years. Indeed an enquiry made in over three hundred U. P. villages in the Eastern province shows that the price of the produce at the present rate does not even cover the rents payable. This makes no allowance for the cost of cultivation. I am prepared to admit that the inquiry was not made by experts. It therefore lacks scientific precision. But such as it is, it is revealing enough to make one pause and think.

Mr Hooper, once a Settlement Officer, is said to have given the following landlord's definition of the U. P. tenant :

> " One who is ready to live on one meal a day, and in native phrase to sell his wife and children to pay the highest possible rent for his holding, who submits to any cesses it may please his landlord to demand, and who is always willing to work for him without payment, to give evidence for him in court and generally speaking to do any conceivable thing he is told."

The description is not flattering to the Zamindars, but since Mr Hooper's time the Zamindars' ideas have undergone a revolution. Many of them are sympathetic to their tenants. They try to make common cause with them. But the process has to be much faster than it has been. With the great awakening among the *kisans* there must be growing dissatisfaction with their lot, and a growing assertion of their rights.

I would like the Zamindars to recognize the correctness of the *kisans'* position and make a corresponding change in their own outlook. The present crisis will be somehow tided over. But it would be wrong to go to sleep over it.

The Zamindars would do well to take time by the forelock. Let them cease to be mere rent collectors. They should become trustees and trusted friends of their tenants.

They should limit their privy purse. Let them forgo the questionable perquisites they take from the tenants in the shape of forced gifts on marriage and other occasions, or *nazrana* on transfer of holdings from one *kisan* to another, or on restoration to the same *kisan* after eviction for non-payment of rent. They should give them fixity of tenure, take a lively interest in their welfare, provide well-managed schools for their children, night schools for adults, hospitals and dispensaries for the sick, look after the sanitation of villages and in a variety of ways make them feel that they, the Zamindars, are their true friends taking only a fixed commission for their manifold services. In short, they must justify their position. They should trust Congressmen. They may themselves become Congressmen and know that the Congress is a bridge between the people and the Government. All who have the true welfare of the people at heart can harness the services of the Congress. Congressmen will on their part see to it that *kisans* scrupulously fulfil their obligations to the Zamindars. I mean not necessarily the statutory, but the obligations which they have themselves admitted to be just. They must reject the doctrine that their holdings are absolutely theirs to the exclusion of the Zamindars. They are or should be members of a joint family in which the Zamindar is the head guarding their rights against encroachment. Whatever the law may be, the Zamindari to be defensible must approach the conditions of a joint family.

I like the ideal of Rama and Janaka. They owned nothing against the people. Everything including themselves belonged to the people. They lived in their midst a life not above theirs but in correspondence with theirs. But these may not be regarded as historical personages. Then let us take the example of the great Caliph Omar. Though he was monarch of a vast realm created by his great genius and amazing industry, he lived the life of a pauper and never considered himself owner of the vast treasures that lay at his feet. He was a terror to those officials who squandered people's money in luxuries.

Young India, 28-5-'31

ZAMINDARS AND TALUKDARS

Nothing during the recent U. P. tour pleased me more than the way in which several young Zamindars and Talukdars had simplified their lives and fired by patriotic zeal were easing the burden of the ryots. I had heard fearful accounts of the alleged atrocities of many Zamindars and their mode of levying cesses legal and illegal on all conceivable occasions with the result that the ryot was reduced to serfdom pure and simple. The discovery therefore of so many young Talukdars was a very pleasant surprise to me.

But the improvement has to go further and be thorough. There is yet even among the best of them a wide gulf between themselves and the ryots. There is yet a great deal of patronizing and self-satisfaction over the little that has been done. The fact is that whatever may be done is no more than a belated return to the ryots of their due. The hideous caricature of *varnashrama* is responsible for the air of superiority that the so-called Kshatriya assumes and the status of inherited inferiority the poor ryot submissively accepts as his deserved lot in life. If Indian society is to make real progress along peaceful lines there must be a definite recognition on the part of the moneyed class that a ryot possesses the same soul that they do and that their wealth gives them no superiority over the poor. They must regard themselves even as the Japanese nobles did, as trustees holding their wealth for the good of their wards, the ryots. Then they would take no more than a reasonable amount as commission for their labours. At present there is no proportion between the wholly unnecessary pomp and extravagance of the moneyed class and the squalid surroundings and the grinding pauperism of the ryots in whose midst the former are living. A model Zamindar would at once therefore reduce much of the burden the ryot is now bearing. He would

come in intimate touch with the ryots and know their wants and inject hope into them in the place of despair which is killing the very life out of them. He will not be satisfied with the ryots' ignorance of the laws of sanitation and hygiene. He would reduce himself to poverty in order that the ryot may have the necessaries of life. He will study the economic condition of the ryots under his care, establish schools in which he will educate his own children side by side with those of the ryots. He will purify the village well and the village tank. He will teach the ryot to sweep his roads and clean his latrines by himself doing this necessary labour. He will throw open without reserve his own gardens for the unrestricted use of the ryot. He will use as hospital, school, or the like most of the unnecessary buildings which he keeps for his pleasure. If only the capitalist class will read the signs of the times, revise their notions of God-given right to all they possess, in an incredibly short space of time the seven hundred thousand dung-heaps which today pass muster as villages can be turned into abodes of peace, health and comfort. I am convinced that the capitalist, if he follows the Samurai of Japan, has nothing really to lose and everything to gain. There is no other choice than between voluntary surrender on the part of the capitalist of superfluities and consequent acquisition of the real happiness of all on the one hand, and on the other, the impending chaos into which, if the capitalist does not wake up betimes, awakened but ignorant, famishing millions will plunge the country and which, not even the armed force that a powerful government can bring into play, can avert. I have hoped that India will successfully avert the disaster. The privilege I had of meeting intimately some of the young Talukdars in the U. P. has strengthened the hope.

Young India, 5-12-'29

79

SPECIAL INTERESTS *

I come to sub-head (v), *representation by special constituencies of special interests.* Under adult suffrage, certainly labour units, and so on, do not require any special representation ; landlords most decidedly no, and I will give you my reason. There is no desire on the part of the Congress, and there is no desire on the part of these dumb paupers, to dispossess landlords of their possessions, but they would have landlords to act as trustees for the tenants. I think that it should be a matter of pride for the landlords to feel that their ryots, these millions of villagers, would prefer them as their candidates and as their representatives than others coming from other parts or some one from among themselves.

Therefore what will happen is that the landlords will have to make common cause with the ryots, and what can be nobler, what can be better, than that they should do so ? But if the landlords insisted on special treatment and special representation in either Chamber, if there are two Chambers, or in the one popular Chamber, I am afraid that they would be really throwing an apple of discord into our midst, and I am hoping that no such claim would be put forward on behalf of the landlords or any such interest.

Young India, 8-10-'31

* From Gandhiji's second speech at the Federal Structure Committee of the Second Round Table Conference, London.

80

KISANS AND ZAMINDARS

" The difference between your view and mine is based on the question whether the Zamindari system is to be mended or ended. I say it should be mended, and if it cannot be mended, it would end itself. You say that it is incapable of being mended." In these words Gandhiji summed up the difference between the Socialist school, and what may be called the Satyagrahi school, before an informal meeting of Calcutta Congressmen. At the root of the various questions that arise on the subject lies this fundamental difference, and the answers to those questions naturally reflect the philosophy which the replier holds. Thus one of the questions that puzzles many is:

" The Zamindars and *mahajans* are the instruments of the bureaucracy. They have always sided with it and are an obstacle to our progress and freedom. Why should not the obstacle be removed ? "

To this Gandhiji's reply reflecting his philosophy was this: " They are indeed part and parcel of the bureaucracy. But they are its helpless tools. Must they for ever remain so ? We may do nothing to put them away from us. If they change their mentality, their services can be utilized for the nation. If they will not change, they will die a natural death. If we have non-violence in us, we will not frighten them. We have to be doubly careful when the Congress has power ".

Q. But can't we say the system of Zamindari is an anachronism and should go, by non-violent means of course ?

A. Of course we can. The question is 'must we ?' Why can we not say to the Zamindars, 'These are the evils which we ask you to remove yourselves'? I admit that this presumes trust in human nature.

Q. Would you say that the Permanent Settlement should remain ?

A. No, it has to go. The way to make the *kisans* happy and prosperous is to educate them to know the reason of their present condition and how to mend it. We may show them the non-violent way or the violent. The latter may look tempting, but it is the way to perdition in the long run.

Q. But don't you agree that the land belongs to him who tills it?

A. I do. But that need not mean that the Zamindar should be wiped out. The man who supplies brains and metal is as much a tiller as the one who labours with his hands. What we aim at, or should, is to remove the present terrible inequality between them.

Q. But the mending process may be very long.

A. Seemingly the longest process is often the shortest.

Q. But why not parcel out the land among the tillers?

A. That is a hasty thought. The land is today in their hands. But they know neither their rights nor how to exercise them. Supposing they were told neither to move out of the land nor to pay their dues to the Zamindars, do you think their misery would be over? Surely much will still remain to be done. I suggest that that should be undertaken now and the rest will follow as day follows night.

That led to the question of the Kisan Sabhas, their relations with the Congress, their scope and their function.

"My opinion," said Gandhiji, "is clear-cut, since I have worked among the *kisans* and labour all my life. There is nothing constitutionally wrong in the Congress allowing the Kisan Sabhas to work independently nor in allowing the office-bearers of the Kisan Sabhas to be office-bearers of the Congress, for they will come in the usual way. But my study of separate *kisan* organizations has led me definitely to the conclusion that they are not working for the interests of the *kisans* but are organized only with a view to capturing the Congress organization. They can do even this by leading the *kisans* along the right

channels, but I am afraid they are misleading them. If the *kisans* and their leaders will capture the Congress by doing nothing but authorized Congress work, there is no harm. But if they do so by making false registers, storming meetings and so on, it would be something like Fascism.

" But the main question is whether you want the Kisan Sabhas to strengthen the Congress or to weaken it, to use the *kisans'* organization to capture the Congress or to serve the *kisans*, whether the Sabha is to be a rival organization working apparently in the name of the Congress or one carrying out the Congress programme and policy. If it is really a rival organization and Congress organization only in name, its strength and energy will be utilized in resisting the Congress and those of the Congress will be utilized in resisting the Kisan Sabha, with the result that the poor *kisans* will be ground between the two mill stones."

Harijan, 23-4-'38

81

THE NON-VIOLENT SANCTION

Supposing a land-owner exploits his tenants and mulcts them of the fruit of their toil by appropriating it to his own use. When they expostulate with him he does not listen and raises objection that he requires so much for his wife, so much for his children and so on. The tenants or those who have espoused their cause and have influence will make an appeal to his wife to expostulate with her husband. She would probably say that for herself she does not need his exploited money. The children will say likewise that they would earn for themselves what they need.

Supposing further that he listens to nobody or that his wife and children combine against the tenants, they will not submit. They will quit if asked to do so but they will make it clear that the land belongs to him who tills it. The owner cannot till all the land himself and he will have to give in to their just demands. It may, however, be that the tenants are replaced by others. Agitation short of violence

will then continue till the replacing tenants see their error and make common cause with the evicted tenants. Thus Satyagraha is a process of educating public opinion, such that it covers all the elements of society and in the end makes itself irresistible. Violence interrupts the process and prolongs the real revolution of the whole social structure.

The conditions necessary for the success of Satyagraha are: (1) The *Satyagrahi* should not have any hatred in his heart against the opponent; (2) The issue must be true and substantial; (3) The *Satyagrahi* must be prepared to suffer till the end for his cause.

Harijan, 31-3-'46

SECTION NINE: CAPITALISTS AND LANDLORDS AS TRUSTEES

82

SO-CALLED INCONSISTENCIES

I have some very persistent correspondents who put posers before me. Here is a specimen letter from one such correspondent:

"Whenever economic troubles arise and whenever questions have been put to you on the economic relations of capital and labour, you have put forth the theory of trusteeship which has always puzzled me. You want the rich to hold all their property in trust for the poor and expend it for their benefit. If I ask you whether this is possible, you will tell me that my question arises from a belief in the essential selfishness of human nature and that your theory is based on the essential goodness of human nature. However, in the political sphere, you do not hold such views without, at the same time, losing your faith in the fundamental goodness of human nature. The British claim the same trusteeship for their domination of India. But you have lost faith in the British Empire long ago, and today there is no greater enemy to it than you. Is it consistent to have one law for the political world and another for the economic world? Or do you mean to say that you have not lost faith in capitalism and capitalists just as you have lost faith in British Imperialism and the British? For, your trusteeship theory sounds very much like the Divine Right theory of kings which has been exploded long ago. When one man, who was allowed to hold political power in trust for all the others and who derived it from them, misused it, people revolted against it and democracy was born. Similarly now when a few, who ought to hold the economic power in trust for the others from whom they derive it, use it for their own self-aggrandizement and to the detriment of the rest, the inevitable result is the deprivation of the few of the means of economic power by the many, i.e. the birth of Socialism.

Hitherto violence was the only recognized means to attain anything good or bad. When violence is employed even with a view to achieve good, it brings evil in its train and compromises the good achieved. Now I take it that your definite contribution to the world lies in your having successfully demonstrated the efficacy of another means, namely non-violence which is superior to violence and does not poison human relations. Therefore, my

fondest hope is that you should fight and end the present economic order non-violently and help to create a new one."

I see no inconsistency in my treatment of capitalism or imperialism. My correspondent has been led into a confusion of thought. I have not talked or thought of what Kings, Imperialists or Capitalists claim and have claimed. I have talked and written of how capital may be treated. And then it is one thing to make a claim and another to live up to it. Not every one like me (say) who claims to be a servant of the people becomes that by the mere assertion. And yet all would appreciate persons like me, if we were found to be living up to our claim. Similarly would all rejoice if a capitalist were to divest himself of exclusive ownership and declare himself to be in possession as a trustee for the people. It is highly probable that my advice will not be accepted and my dream will not be realized. But who can guarantee that the socialists' dream will be realized? Socialism was not born with the discovery of the misuse of capital by capitalists. As I have contended, socialism, even communism, is explicit in the first verse of the *Ishopanishad.* What is true is that when some reformers lost faith in the method of conversion, the technique of what is known as scientific socialism was born. I am engaged in solving the same problem that faces scientific socialists. It is true however that my approach is always and only through unadulterated non-violence. It may fail. If it does, it will be because of my ignorance of the technique of non-violence. I may be a bad exponent of the doctrine in which my faith is daily increasing. The A. I. S. A. and the A. I. V. I. A. are organizations through which the technique of non-violence is being tested on an all-India scale. They are special autonomous bodies created by the Congress for the purpose of enabling me to conduct my experiments without being fettered by the vicissitudes of policy to which a wholly democratic body like the Congress is always liable. Trusteeship, as I conceive it, has yet to prove its worth. It is an attempt to secure the best use of property for the people by competent hands.

Harijan, 20-2-'37

83

THE THEORY OF TRUSTEESHIP

Q. From your writings one gathers the notion that your 'trustee' is not anything more than a very benevolent philanthropist and donor, such as the first Parsi Baronet, the Tatas, the Wadias, the Birlas, Shri Bajaj and the like. Is that so? Will you please explain whom you regard as the primary or rightful beneficiaries of the possessions of a rich man? Is there to be a limit to the amount or part of the income and capital which he can spend upon himself, his kith and kin and for non-public purposes? Can one who exceeds such limit be prevented from doing so? If he is incompetent or otherwise fails to discharge his obligations as a trustee, can he be removed and called upon to render accounts by a beneficiary or the State? Do the same principles apply to Princes and Zamindars, or is their trusteeship of a different nature?

A. If the trusteeship idea catches, philanthropy, as we know it, will disappear. Of those you have named only Jamnalalji came near, but only near, it. A trustee has no heir but the public. In a State built on the basis of non-violence, the commission of trustees will be regulated. Princes and Zamindars will be on a par with the other men of wealth.

Sevagram, 6-4-'42

Harijan, 12-4-'42

TRUSTEESHIP

Q. Is it possible to defend by means of non-violence anything which can only be gained through violence ?

A. What is gained by violence cannot only not be defended by non-violence but the latter requires the abandonment of the ill-gotten gains.

Q. Is the accumulation of capital possible except through violence whether open or tacit ?

A. Such accumulation by private persons is impossible except through violent means but accumulation by the State in a non-violent society is not only possible, it is desirable and inevitable.

Q. Whether a man accumulates material or moral wealth he does so only through the help or co-operation of other members of society. Has he then the moral right to use any of it mainly for personal advantage ?

A. No, he has no moral right.

Q. How would the successor of a trustee be determined ? Will he only have the right of proposing a name, the right of finalization being vested in the State ?

A. Choice should be given to the original owner who became the first trustee, but the choice must be finalized by the State. Such arrangement puts a check on the State as well as the individual.

Q. When the replacement of private by public property thus takes place through the operation of the theory of trusteeship, will the ownership vest in the State, which is an instrument of violence or in associations of a voluntary character like village communes and municipalities, which may of course derive their final authority from State-made laws ?

A. That question involves some confusion of thought. Legal ownership in the transformed condition vested in the trustee, not in the State. It is to avoid confiscation that the doctrine of trusteeship came into play retaining for the

society the ability of the original owner in his own right. Nor need the State always be based on violence. It might be so in theory but the practice of the theory demands a State which would for the most part be based on non-violence.

Satgharia (Noakhali), 2-2-'47

Harijan, 16-2-'47

85

WHAT IS A TRUST ?

" You have asked rich men to be trustees. Is it implied that they should give up private ownership in their property and create out of it a trust valid in the eyes of the law and managed democratically ? How will the successor of the present incumbent be determined on his demise ?"

In answer to the question Gandhiji said that he adhered to the position taken by him years ago that everything belonged to God and was from God. Therefore it was for His people as a whole, not for a particular individual. When an individual had more than his proportionate portion he became a trustee of that portion for God's people.

God who was all-powerful had no need to store. He created from day to day ; hence men also should in theory live from day to day and not stock things. If this truth was imbibed by the people generally, it would become legalized and trusteeship would become a legalized institution. He wished it became a gift from India to the world. Then there would be no exploitation and no reserves as in Australia and other countries for White men and their posterity. In these distinctions lay the seed of a war more virulent than the last two. As to the successor, the trustee in office would have the right to nominate his successor subject to legal sanction.

Harijan, 23-2-'47

86

RAJAS AND ZAMINDARS

It can be asked whether the present *Rajas* and others can be expected to become trustees of the poor. If they do not become trustees of their own accord, force of circumstances will compel the reform unless they court utter destruction. When *Panchayat Raj* is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do. The present power of the Zamindars, the capitalists and the *Rajas* can hold sway only so long as the common people do not realize their own strength. If the people non-co-operate with the evil of *zamindari* or capitalism, it must die of inanition. In *Panchayat Raj* only the *Panchayat* will be obeyed and the *Panchayat* can only work through the law of their making.

New Delhi, 25-5-'47

Harijan, 1-6-'47

SECTION TEN : THE POOR

87

NO LABOUR, NO MEAL

Some time ago I was taken to a magnificent mansion called the 'Marble Palace' in Calcutta. It is richly furnished with some very expensive and some very beautiful paintings. The owners feed in the compound in front of the palace all the beggars who choose to go there, and I am told that the number every day is several thousand. This is no doubt a princely charity. It does great credit to the benevolent spirit of the donors, but the incongruity of this ragged humanity feeding whilst the majestic palace is, as it were, mocking at their wretched condition does not seem to strike the donors at all. Another such painful sight was witnessed by me on my visit to Suri where the reception committee had arranged for feeding the beggars of the district. At the Marble Palace the crowd that besieged me passed through the line of beggars eating off their dusty leaves spread on the ground. Some almost trampled over them. In Suri it was a little more decently managed, for the crowd was not to pass through the line of beggars, but the motor car that drove me to my destination, was slowly taken through the line of the beggars as they were eating. I felt humiliated, more so to think that this was all done in my honour, because, as it was put to me by one of the friends there, I was 'friend of the poor'. My friendship for them must be a sorry affair if I could be satisfied with a large part of humanity being reduced to beggary. Little did my friends know that my friendship for the paupers of India has made me hard-hearted enough to contemplate their utter starvation with equanimity in preference to their utter reduction to beggary. My *ahimsa* would not

tolerate the idea of giving a free meal to a healthy person who has not worked for it in some honest way, and if I had the power I would stop every *sadavrat* where free meals are given. It has degraded the nation and it has encouraged laziness, idleness, hypocrisy and even crime. Such misplaced charity adds nothing to the wealth of the country, whether material or spiritual, and gives a false sense of meritoriousness to the donor. How nice and wise it would be if the donor were to open institutions where they would give meals under healthy, clean surroundings to men and women who would work for them. I personally think that the spinning wheel or any of the processes that cotton has to go through, will be an ideal operation. But, if they will not have that, they may choose any other work. Only the rule should be 'No labour, No meal.' Every city has its own difficult problem of beggars, a problem for which the moneyed men are responsible. I know it is easier to fling free meals in the faces of idlers, but much more difficult to organize an institution where honest work has to be done before meals are served. From a pecuniary standpoint, in the initial stages at any rate, the cost of feeding people after taking work from them will be more than the cost of the present free kitchens. But I am convinced that it will be cheaper in the long run, if we do not want to increase in geometrical progression the race of loafers which is fast overrunning this land.

Young India, 13-8-'25

88

WORK AS THE ONLY CURE FOR POVERTY

In one of his talks to the students of the Village Workers' Training School, Gandhiji said: "I have indeed wept to see the stark poverty and unemployment in our country, but I must confess our own negligence and ignorance are largely responsible for it. We do not know the dignity of labour as such. Thus a shoemaker will not do anything beyond his shoes, he will think all other labour is below his dignity. That wrong notion must go. There is enough employement in India for all who will work with their hands and feet honestly. God has given everyone the capacity to work and earn more than his daily bread, and whoever is ready to use that capacity is sure to find work. No labour is too mean for one who wants to earn an honest penny. The only thing is the readiness to use the hands and feet that God has given us."

Harijan, 19-12-'36

89

A TERRIBLE CONTRAST

A friend having for the first time seen New Delhi and the Assembly Hall in March last writes:

"I would like to draw your attention to a very important matter. It is this. I was the other day for the first time in the Assembly Hall and it was for the first time then that I saw New Delhi also. I could see how millions must have been poured into the construction of New Delhi to make it so imposing. The Assembly Hall too presents an equally imposing appearance. But as I came out of the Assembly Hall, I saw dilapidated huts which turned out to be a labour camp where I thought must be living the coolies working at the construction of New Delhi. I went in and the sight of it caused me deep distress. I saw that the huts given to the poor labourers were practically unfit for human habitation. And these dilapidated structures were the place where after a day's strenuous labours, these poor people were expected to retire for well-deserved rest. In some places the walls were

made without any mortar, without any mud; simply bricks seemed to have been piled one upon another.

"The contrast between the palaces built in New Delhi for wealthy people and the miserable huts allotted to the people whose labour was responsible for the palaces was too terrible for contemplation. The coolie women seemed to be unconcerned. It was in the evening that I saw this labour camp and the women were returning from work. And as they went, they were singing. But my heart was weeping. How could the Government spend millions after the comforts of high-placed officials and moneyed men when the labourers themselves were so wretchedly housed? How, I thought to myself, could the members of the Assembly day after day miss the horrible contrast which I could see even during the few moments that I was in New Delhi? They talked of many big things, they brought forward many resolutions, could they not put in one word on behalf of the poor, dumb and ignorant labourers? Could they not imagine how the labourers could have passed terribly cold winter nights in New Delhi in their miserable huts? I have said nothing to any of the members. But could you not do anything in this matter? I have said nothing because I could influence no one; but you may think it worth while doing something. You are a friend of the poor and might be able to secure some relief. Anyway, I could not help disburdening myself to you."

I have summarized the main contents of the letter which my fair correspondent has written in Hindi. The criminal disparity that exists between the condition of labour and that of capital is no new thing in modern times. The discovery made by the friend reminds one of the discovery said to have been made centuries ago by Gautam Buddha. It was no new thing he saw. But the shock received by the sight of old age, disease and other miseries of life transformed his life and materially affected the fortunes of the world. It is well that this lady has received her first shock. If she and the other cultured women of India, who have received their education at the expense of the very poor people of whom the correspondent writes so pathetically, will dive deeper and make some slight return to those poor people by making common cause with them, some alleviation in their distressful condition will not be long in coming. Every place that one sees in India is a demonstration not of her riches but of the insolence of power that riches give to

the few, who owe them to the miserably requited labours of the millions of paupers of India. We have a Government which is based upon and which only exists by the exploitation of the toiling millions.

A friend sent me the other day a cutting from an English newspaper which considered Rs 1,500 for an Englishman to be not enough for his wants in India, and it warned Englishmen from venturing out to India, if they could get no more than Rs 1,500 per month. There is no need to quarrel with that standard. From the writer's own standpoint, Rs 1,500 per month is demonstrably inadequate because he regards club life, a motor car, migration to a hill-station during the hot months, education of children in England to be the necessary minimum. All one can say and one must say about this standard is, that if it is the indispensable minimum, it is a standard too expensive for India to afford, and however beneficial in the abstract the services of English officials may be demonstrated to be, if the toiling millions are to live, they must get along without these beneficial services for the simple reason that the benefit is beyond the reach of their pockets. I suppose it is possible to demonstrate that if the millions of India could be translated to some bracing Himalayan plateau, they would be able to double the length of their days on earth. But it is a proposition which they will laugh out of court as beyond their reach.

What the lady observed in New Delhi is but a tiny symptom of an ever-growing and deep-seated disease which is daily destroying the lives of thousands of people. It is quite possible to imagine that if an energetic member of the Assembly moved a resolution calling upon the Government to provide better housing accommodation for the labourers, the resolution would be carried, that it would not be vetoed and that the Government would gladly give effect to it at the expense of millions poorer still than these labourers. I am sure that this is not what the fair friend really desires. What she desires in common with every Indian who knows anything of the country is a radical change in the

system of Government which is top-heavy and which under the intolerable weight is crushing day after day the poor inhabitants of this country who are groaning at the bottom. I have pointed the way out of this difficult situation times without number. I do not know another.

Young India, 28-4-'27

90

HOUSING THE POOR

The City Municipality of Bangalore has built 250 houses for its petty employees on a beautifully open plot of land of about 18 acres, at a total cost of Rs 1,05,000. The houses are all separate and well ventilated and the colony which will be provided with a school, dispensary, water taps and lights, and a playground was opened by the Dewan on the 24th June last.

Gandhiji who was invited to inspect the colony went into one of the huts, inspected the details, and said to those concerned that whilst he was glad that the Municipality had made this provision for its employees he could not help saying that the provision was inadequate. "I was taken to the huts of the workers in the Kolar Gold Fields the other day. I could not help remarking that the huts were not fit for human habitation. With the Mining Company declaring fat dividends of 30 to 40 per cent it seemed to be cruel to me that those who earned the profits for them were housed in those dismal hovels. The huts you have built here are certainly better, they are well ventilated and well situated. But there ought to be something like a minimum standard of a hut for unmarried people, and of a hut for married couples, and for couples with children. We ought to realize that husband and wife must not share the same room with grown-up children. These cabins provide for no privacy. I cannot understand municipalities measuring out land for their poor employees by so many feet. One more room for each of these huts and a verandah is an absolute necessity. I am glad you propose

to provide the same facilities for the Harijan employees but pray bear this suggestion in mind when you build houses for them. There are, I am pained to say, still numerous municipalities which provide no housing facilities for their lowest-paid employees. I do not know when we shall realize our duty to the most essential of our servants. If we do not do so ere long the doom will soon settle on our society, as it must, if the society does not correct itself."

Harijan, 11-7-'36

91

A SANCTUARY FOR THE POOR

Gandhiji in his prayer discourse suggested that Mussoorie should have a place where the poor could come and avail themselves of the benefits of the hill climate whenever necessary. . . ." I myself have become a Harijan by choice. I would love to be in a place where Harijans too can come and dwell. A Harijan by birth may repudiate his *varna* but how can I who has become a Harijan by choice ? I have not hesitated to suggest to Caste Hindus that today they have all to become *atishudras*, if the canker of caste feeling is to be eradicated from Hinduism and Hinduism is not to perish from the face of the earth." If there were such a place in Mussoorie itself, where even Harijans would be welcome, he would rather stay there. In answer to a similar suggestion at Panchgani, the people there were planning to have a place of that type. He was glad to inform the gathering that there was some talk already of a committee of the citizens of Mussoorie being formed for that purpose.

Harijan, 9-6-'46

92

DO NOT FORGET THE POOR

Gandhiji said in his post-prayer speech that he had heard that the living conditions of the labourers in Mussoorie were deplorable. They lived in small, overcrowded, dirty and evil-smelling rooms. No one could afford to overlook that. All life was one. If they cleaned their own homes and neglected their neighbours' they would have to pay the price in the form of epidemics and the like. In the West they had been able to rid their countries of plague. He himself had witnessed in South Africa how by prompt and energetic action the Johannesburg Municipality was able to arrest the outbreak of plague so effectively that it never came back. But in India it returned again and again — it had become almost endemic. "The remedy lies in our own hands. We must not only observe the rules of health and hygiene in our own persons but we must see that our poor neighbours do so too. To neglect to do so is a sin for which we cannot escape the penalty. I do not grudge the rich their riches provided that they do not forget the poor and share their riches with them and provided their riches are not gained at the expense of and by the impoverishment of others."

Harijan, 16-6-'46

SKELETONS IN THE CUPBOARDS

As at Simla so at Mussoorie, Gandhiji more than once rattled the skeletons in their cupboards. He spoke to them of the poor rickshaw-pullers and load-carriers there. They should be everyone's concern. They made life possible for the wealthy and yet the latter, while willing to take from them even the inhuman service of rickshaw-pulling, did not care to see where and how they lived, what they ate and what they earned. He had heard that these poor men lived in tiny rooms without adequate light and air; they did not want to reveal how many herded together into one room lest they should be evicted or fined. They were dirtily clad as could be seen from the little crowd of them that had come to attend the prayers that evening. But perhaps they had not the wherewithal to afford a change of clothes. They might be like the woman in Bihar, when he first went there, who, when asked to wash herself and her clothes, said to Ba: "How can I bathe when I have not another *sari* to put on?" It was the bounden duty of those to whom God had given more than their needs to spend the extra on those who were in want. He had been told that the Congress Government was now in power and would see to it that labour quarters everywhere were rebuilt. If they did so it would be a good thing. It would be no more than their bare duty. That would not, however, exonerate rickshaw-riders from *their* duty. Doctors had told him that these poor people pulled these vehicles for four years or so and the work was so hard that they died soon after of lung and heart trouble. How could the users be so callous as not to see that they were properly housed and sufficiently paid and clothed and not overworked?

Harijan, 16-6-'46

DURING MUSSOORIE SOJOURN

During the prayer meetings in Mussoorie I suggested that the gay people of the place might well think of the poor among them, and make their living comfortable, clean and hygienic as also enable the poorest of all classes to find an abode where it would be possible for them to receive the benefit of the hill climate. Both the suggestions have been taken up with enthusiasm. An influential committee has been formed to carry out the idea of a *dharmashala* or *musafarkhana*. I write this note to suggest that much the most important thing would be to have a committee of workers or even one worker who would make it his business to run the guest house in a becoming manner. Seeing that the place will be free of rent it will be no small task to choose the guests who may occupy the premises. Care will have to be taken to exclude those who are at all able to pay a reasonable rent. The visitors must be those who have nothing wherewith to pay. If the place is to be kept absolutely clean, there will have to be rules to be rigidly enforced in the interests of the visitors themselves. And yet the occupants will have to be treated with perfect courtesy. They must never be allowed to feel that poverty is a crime. Every third class traveller knows that the poor receive rough treatment in the railway carriages and at railway stations. It is a sad commentary that in this poor country where according to books poverty carries with it a certain dignity, in public places the poor are treated almost with contempt and they are made to pay for receiving it. It is in this unfortunate atmosphere that this guest house is to be built. Let the committee seek out from now an ideal caretaker who will answer the requirements of the office which are undoubtedly onerous. If such a person is found, the project is bound to be a pattern for all such places on hill stations.

Mussoorie, 8-6-'46

Harijan, 16-6-'46

A DEDICATION

On the 21st of July, Gandhiji had the satisfaction of witnessing the realization of one of his pet projects when Sheth Shantilal of Ahmedabad formally dedicated 'Satish Kunj' property (of Mahabaleshwar, District Satara) for the use of the poor. Prime Minister Shri Balasaheb Kher and Ministers Shri Patil and Shri Tapase had specially come from Poona for the occasion. Speaking after the evening prayer, Gandhiji said that when he came to Panchgani under medical advice in 1944, after his release from detention, he found that there was no place where the poor and the destitute could put up, in order to take advantage of the beautiful climate. And what about the Harijans? He had received a long letter from one of them describing their woes. "It is all right so long as his identity is unknown. But the moment it is discovered, that he is a Harijan, he suddenly becomes a *pariah*. He is unwelcome everywhere. All doors are shut against him. The shopkeeper receives his money but sells him the rottenest stuff and cheats him into the bargain by giving him less than the full measure. Should the poor unfortunate man object, he is insulted and told to be gone. The landlord won't have him and asks him to quit. Where is the poor man to go?" It was heart-rending. He felt he could not come and stay in Panchgani, unless there was a place where the Harijans would be welcome like all others. It had therefore given him great pleasure that Panchgani was at last going to have such a place. Sheth Shantilal of Ahmedabad had purchased the 'Satish Kunj' property for Rs 45,000 and had agreed to get it reconditioned and bear the running expenses of the institution for ten years. In the *dharmashala* which was going to be built, the poor of all communities including the Harijans, would be able to come and stay without any distinction of caste or religion. They would be provided free accommodation but would have to make their own

arrangements as regards food etc. A Trust had been formed to look after the *dharmashala*, consisting of Sheth Shantilal of Ahmedabad, Sheth Mohanlal, Shri Bachharaj, Dr Dinshah Mehta and Gandhiji. He would have liked the *dharmashala*, said Gandhiji, to be built out of funds, provided by the inhabitants of Panchgani itself. But finance was not everything. Although they had not contributed the money, they should give their blessings and co-operation. The institution would fail unless the people took active and genuine interest in it. He suggested that sisters from well-to-do families should visit the sick or the convalescent who might come to the *dharmashala* for a change of climate, soothe them by singing beautiful hymns and render them whatever service they could or was necessary.

Harijan, 11-8-'46

96

DIGNITY OF POVERTY

Gandhiji's discourse turned on the 'dignity of poverty'. In the song that had been sung it was said that God is the friend of the poor. Poverty, remarked Gandhiji, had a dignity in our country. The poor man was not ashamed of his poverty. He preferred his hut to the rich man's palace. He even took pride in it. Though poor in material goods, he was not poor in spirit. Contentment was his treasure. He might as well say to himself, "since we cannot all become rich and own palaces, let us at least pull down the palaces of the rich and bring them down to our level." That could bring no happiness or peace either to themselves or anyone else, and God would certainly be not the friend and helper of the poor of such description. Poverty, in the sense of inequality of material possessions was there in every part of the world. That was perhaps in a certain measure inevitable, for all men are not equal either in their talents or the measure of their needs. Even in America which was fabulously rich and where Mammon has taken the place of God, there were many poor. Poet

Malabari had come across some relatives of Shah Alam begging in the streets of Rangoon. He had written a beautiful poem about it which had sunk into his heart. The substance of it was that he alone is rich who has God for his friend and helper. In India there was a particular type of man who delighted in having as few needs as possible. He carried with him only a little flour and a pinch of salt and chillies tied in his napkin. He had a *lota* and a string to draw water from the well. He needed nothing else. He walked on foot covering 10-12 miles a day. He made the dough in his napkin, collected a few twigs to make a fire and baked his dough on the embers. It was called *bati.* He had tasted it and found it most delicious. The relish did not lie in the food but in the appetite, that honest toil and the contentment of the mind give. Such a man had God as his companion and friend and felt richer than any king or emperor. God was not the friend of those who inwardly coveted other's riches. Everyone could copy that example and enjoy ineffable peace and happiness himself and radiate it to others. On the other hand if one hankered after riches, one had to resort to exploitation, by whatever name it might be called. Even then the crores could not become millionaires. True happiness lay in contentment and companionship with God only.

Harijan, 21-7-'46

SECTION ELEVEN : COMMUNISM

97

CAN YOU AVOID CLASS WAR ?

Q. If you will benefit the workers, the peasant and the factory hand, can you avoid class war ?

A. I can, most decidedly, if only the people will follow the non-violent method. The past twelve months have abundantly shown the possibility of non-violence adopted even as a policy. When the people adopt it as a principle of conduct, class war becomes an impossibility. The experiment in that direction is being tried in Ahmedabad. It has yielded most satisfactory results and there is every likelihood of its proving conclusive. By the non-violent method we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the retention and the increase of his capital. Nor need the worker wait for his conversion. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be used destructively or creatively. Either is dependent on the other. Immediately the worker realizes his strength, he is in a position to become a co-sharer of the capitalist instead of remaining his slave. If he aims at becoming the sole owner, he will most likely be killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Inequalities in intelligence and even opportunity will last till the end of time. A man living on the banks of a river has any day more opportunity of growing crops than one living in an arid desert. But if inequalities stare us in the face, the essential equality too is not to be missed. Every man has an equal right for the necessaries of life even as birds and beasts have. And since every right carries with it a corresponding duty and the corresponding remedy of

resisting any attack upon it, it is merely a matter of finding out the corresponding duties and remedies to vindicate the fundamental elementary equality. The corresponding duty is to labour with my limbs, and the corresponding remedy is to non-co-operate with him who deprives me of the fruit of my labour. And if I would recognize the fundamental equality, as I must, of the capitalist and the labourer, I must not aim at his destruction. I must strive for his conversion. My non-co-operation with him will open his eyes to the wrong he may be doing. Nor need I be afraid of some one else taking my place when I have non-co-operated. For I expect to influence my co-workers so as not to help the wrong-doing of my employer. This kind of education of the mass of workers is no doubt a slow process, but as it is also the surest, it is necessarily the quickest. It can be easily demonstrated that destruction of the capitalist must mean destruction in the end of the worker and as no human being is so bad as to be beyond redemption, no human being is so perfect as to warrant his destroying him whom he wrongly considers to be wholly evil.

Young India, 26-3-'31

98

A WORD TO COMMUNISTS

[Addressing a labour meeting in Bombay which was disturbed by some young Communists Gandhiji made a Hindi speech of which the following is a condensed translation.]

I knew that there were Communists in India, but I had not met them outside the Meerut Jail, nor even heard their speeches. I made a point of interviewing the Meerut prisoners two years ago during my tour in the U. P. and thus managed to know them somewhat. I have heard one of them this evening, and I may tell them that much as they claim to win Swaraj for the workingman, I have my doubts about their ability to do so. I had made the workingman's cause my own long before any of the young

Communists here were born. I spent the best part of my time in South Africa working for them. I used to live with them, and shared their joys and sorrows. You must therefore understand why I claim to speak for labour. I invite you to come to me and discuss things with me as frankly as you can.

You claim to be Communists, but you do not seem to live the life of Communism. I may tell you that I am trying my best to live up to the ideal of Communism in the best sense of the term....If you want to carry the country with you, you ought to be able to react on it by reasoning with it. You cannot do so by coercion. You may deal destruction to bring the country round to your view. But how many will you destroy? Not tens of millions. You may kill a few thousands if you had millions with you. But today you are no more than a handful. I ask you to convert the Congress if you can and to take charge of it. It is open to you to give the fullest vent to your views. India is tolerant enough to listen patiently to any one who can talk coherently.

The truce has done no harm to the labourers. I claim that none of my activities has ever harmed the workers, can ever harm them. If the Congress sends its representatives to the Conference, they will press for no Swaraj other than the Swaraj for workers and peasants. Long before the Communist party came into existence, the Congress had decided that that Swaraj would have no meaning which was not the Swaraj for workers and peasants. Perhaps, none of you workers here gets less than a monthly wage of Rs 20, but, I am working for winning Swaraj not only for you but for those toiling and unemployed millions who do not get even a square meal a day and have to scratch along with a piece of stale *roti* and a pinch of salt. But I do not want to deceive you. I must warn you that I do not bear any ill to the capitalists; I can think of doing them no harm. But I want, by means of suffering, to awaken them to their sense of duty. I want to melt their hearts and get them to render justice to their less fortunate brethren. They are human beings, and my appeal to them

will not go in vain. The history of Japan reveals many an instance of self-sacrificing capitalists. During the last Satyagraha, quite a number of capitalists went in for considerable sacrifice, went to jails and suffered. Do you want to estrange them? Don't you want them to work with you for the common end?

God has given you intellect and talent. Turn them to proper account. I beseech you not to lay an embargo on your reason. God help you.

Young India, 26-3-'31

99

A WORKERS' REPUBLIC

A few representatives of the Red Shirts waited in deputation on Gandhiji and had a long heart to heart talk with him. They explained that it was never their intention to do any physical harm to him, that his life and his health were as dear to them as to any one else, and that individual terrorism was not their creed. They were adamant in their quarrel with the truce which, they believed, can never lead them to their goal of Workers' and Peasants' Free Republic in India. "But my dear young men," said Gandhiji to them, overflowing with affection, "go and see Bihar and you will find a workers' and peasants' republic working there. Where there was fear and slavery ten years ago, there is courage and bravery and resistance to wrong. If you want capital to be extinct or if you want to abolish moneyed men or the capitalists, you will never succeed. What you must do is to demonstrate to the capitalists the power of labour and they will consent to be the trustees of those who toil for them. I do not want anything more for workers and peasants than enough to eat and house and clothe themselves and live in ordinary comfort as self-respecting human beings. After that condition of things is brought about the brainiest among them will certainly manage to acquire more wealth than the rest. But I have told you what I want. I want the rich to hold their riches

in trust for the poor or to give them up for them. Do you know that I gave up all my property when I founded Tolstoy Farm? Ruskin's *Unto This Last* inspired me and I built my farm on those lines. You will now recognize that I am, so to say, a 'foundation member' of your peasants' and workers' republic. And what do you prize more — wealth or work? Supposing you were to be stranded in the desert of Sahara with cartloads of money, how would it help you? But if you can work you may not have to go hungry. How then is wealth to be preferred to work? Go and see for yourselves the Labour Union of Ahmedabad at work and see how they are trying to establish a republic of their own."

Young India, 2-4-'31

100

THE YOUNG COMMUNISTS' CATECHISM

Mrs Naidu, who has in her somewhat of the ancient Roman dames' love for gladiatorial combats no less than their proverbial pride in their young children, introduced to Gandhiji the other day, a group of young Indian Communists headed by Baba, her youngest son. Naturally, she was made by Gandhiji to preside over the bloodless tournament that she had arranged.

Earnest Seekers

These young men were all more or less exiles * from their mother country and were dreadfully in earnest. I think, they all greatly loved Gandhiji and could not understand how, with his passion for social justice and concern for the poor, he could possibly help not sharing their theories. 'We have often experienced difficulty in understanding your language,' began Baba, 'for you are not only moulding a nation but the English tongue too and we very often find that when you mean one thing, people understand it in a different sense altogether. We have, therefore,

* The discussion took place in England when Gandhiji visited it to attend the second Round Table Conference in 1931. — Ed.

come to see whether we cannot discover a common ground behind our apparent differences.' With this they took up a formidable array of questions which they had left with Gandhiji a few days back. Some of these questions and Gandhiji's answers are given below.

Position of Privileged Classes

The first question was :

'How exactly do you think the Indian Princes, landlords, millowners and money-lenders and other profiteers are enriched ?'

'At the present moment by exploiting the masses,' was Gandhiji's reply.

'Can these classes be enriched without the exploitation of the Indian workers and peasants ?' they next asked.

'To a certain extent, yes,' Gandhiji replied.

'Have these classes any social justification to live more comfortably than the ordinary worker and peasant who does the work which provides the wealth ?'

'No justification,' replied Gandhiji categorically. 'My idea of society is,' he proceeded to explain, 'that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all have not the same capacity. It is, in the nature of things, impossible. For instance, all cannot have the same height, or colour or degree of intelligence etc. Therefore, in the nature of things, some will have ability to earn more and others less. People with talents will have more, and they will utilize their talents for this purpose. If they utilize their talents kindly, they will be performing the work of the State. Such people exist as trustees, on no other terms. I would allow a man of intellect to earn more, I would not cramp his talent. But the bulk of his greater earnings must be used for the good of the State, just as the income of all earning sons of the father goes to the common family fund. They would have their earnings only as trustees. It may be that I would fail miserably in this. But that is what I am sailing for. And that is what is implied in the Declaration of Fundamental Rights too.'

Class War

This led on to a discussion of 'class war' as a means for bringing about the desired transformation of the privileged classes.

Q. Don't you think that the peasants and workers are justified in carrying on a class war for economic and social emancipation so that they can be free once and for all from the burden of supporting parasitic classes in society ?

A. No. I myself am carrying on a revolution on their behalf. But it is a non-violent revolution.

Q. By your movement for the reduction of rents in the U. P. you may ameliorate the condition of the peasants, but you do not strike at the root of the system.

A. Yes. But you can't do everything at one and the same time.

Q. How then will you bring about trusteeship ? Is it by persuasion ?

A. Not merely by verbal persuasion. I will concentrate on my means. Some have called me the greatest revolutionary of my time. It may be false, but I believe myself to be a revolutionary — a non-violent revolutionary. My means are non-co-operation. No person can amass wealth without the co-operation, willing or forced, of the people concerned.

Privileged Classes as Trustees

That, however, did not quite satisfy them. They challenged the very basis of existing privileges which certain classes at present enjoy. 'Who constituted the capitalists trustees ? Why are they entitled to a commission, and how will you fix the commission ?' they asked. 'They will be entitled to a commission,' explained Gandhiji, 'because money is in their possession. Nobody constituted them trustees. I am inviting them to act as trustees. I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e. owners, not in their own right, but owners, in the right of those whom they have exploited. I will not dictate to them what

commission to take, but ask them to take what is fair, e.g. I would ask a man who possesses Rs 100 to take Rs 50 and give the other Rs 50 to the workers. But to him who possesses Rs 1,00,00,000 I would perhaps say take 1 per cent for yourself. So you see that my commission would not be a fixed figure because that would result in atrocious injustice.'

Individual *vs.* the System

The next set of questions related to Gandhiji's attitude towards a crusade against the Indian capitalists and Zamindars, and enabled him to explain the necessity of observing the distinction between the system and the man. It also enabled him to set forth his concrete agrarian and economic programme. 'The Maharajas and landlords,' they said, 'sided with the British. But, you find your support in the masses. The masses, however, see in them their enemy. What would be your attitude if the masses decided the fate of these classes when they are in power ?'

'The masses do not today see in landlords and other profiteers their enemy,' Gandhiji replied. 'But the consciousness of the wrong done to them by these classes has to be created in them. I do not teach the masses to regard the capitalists as their enemies, but I teach them that they are their own enemies. Non-co-operators never told the people that the British or General Dyer were bad, but that they were the victims of a system. So that the system must be destroyed and not the individual. That is the reason why British officials can live with impunity in a population so fired with the desire for freedom.'

'If you want to attack a system,' they again asked, resuming their broadside, 'there can be no difference between an Indian capitalist and an English capitalist. Why do you not apply non-payment of taxes to Zamindars ?'

"A Zamindar is merely a tool of a system,' answered Gandhiji. 'It is not necessary to take a movement against him at the same time as against the British system. It is possible to distinguish between the two. But, we had to tell the people not to pay to the Zamindars, because, out of this money the Zamindars paid to the

Government. But we have no quarrel with the Zamindars as such, so long as they act well by the tenants.'

Concrete Agrarian Programme

Q. What is your concrete programme to put the peasant and worker in absolute power to decide his own destiny ?

A. My programme is the programme I am working out through the Congress. I am convinced that as a result of it their position today is infinitely superior to what they had occupied within living memory. I don't now refer to their material condition. I refer to the immense awakening that has come among them and the consequent ability to resist injustice and exploitation.

Q. How do you propose to relieve the peasantry of their debt of five hundred crores ?

A. No one knows the exact amount of debt. Such as it is, if the Congress gets the power, the Congress will undertake the scrutiny of the so-called obligations of the peasantry as it insists with regard to the obligations of the incoming Indian Government to be taken over from the outgoing alien Government.

Young India, 26-11-'31

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FORMULA FOR COMMUNISTS

Q. How can we counteract the activities of the Communists, who are openly opposing the Congress?

A. The Communists seem to have made trouble-shooting their profession. I have friends among them. Some of them are like sons to me. But it seems they do not make any distinction between fair and foul, truth and falsehood. They deny the charge. But their reported acts seem to sustain it. Moreover, they seem to take their instructions from Russia, whom they regard as their spiritual home rather than India. I cannot countenance this dependence on an outside power. I have even said that we should not depend even on Russian wheat in our present food crisis. We must have the ability and courage to subsist on what our soil can give us rather than depend on foreign charity. Otherwise, we shall not deserve to exist as an independent country. The same applies to foreign ideologies. I would accept them only to the extent that I can assimilate them and adapt them to the Indian scene. But I must refuse to go under them.

My formula for the Communists, therefore, is that I would prefer to die at their hands, but I will not retaliate.

Harijan, 6-10-'46

GANDHIJI'S COMMUNISM

(By Pyarelal)

Gandhiji has often claimed in the course of his discussions with Communist and Socialist friends that he is a better Communist or a Socialist than they. Their goal is identical. The difference in regard to the means and the technique employed is however fundamental. Changing the structure of society through violence and untruth has no attraction for him because he knows that it will not benefit the dumb millions of India. During the period of his detention in the Aga Khan Palace, he studied Communist literature. He has a scientific mind and the knowledge of Communism and Socialism picked up from his talks with friends and casual reading did not satisfy him. He read *Das Capital* and went through some of the other writings of Marx as also of Engels, Lenin and Stalin. He read some books about the Reds in China too and at the end of it was convinced more than ever that Communism of his conception was the only thing that could bring relief to suffering humanity. In his Ashram and the institutions that are being run under his guidance and inspiration, the ruling principle is: "To each according to his need, from each according to his capacity." His Ashrams are thus themselves experiments in Communism based on non-violence and Indian village conditions. In Sevagram Ashram the dictum is followed that the inmates are there only on the sufferance of the village people. A cantankerous fellow felled some Ashram trees for his use as fuel though he had no title to them. Another encroached upon the right of way through his field although he had accepted compensation for it. No legal redress was applied for. An announcement was made that the Ashram people were there only for the service of the village folk and that they would go away elsewhere if the latter did not want them. Ultimately the trouble-makers were persuaded by their fellow villagers to behave reasonably. In Sabarmati Ashram the women inmates not only merged their domestic kitchens into the communal kitchen and continued to run it but were even persuaded not only to take children other than their own into their families and to look after them like their own but also to let their children be looked after by others. Here was an experiment of pulling down of the walls and emancipation of women without the disintegration of family life — a veritable revolution less the anarchy. But as a friend humorously remarked after dining in the common kitchen of the Talimi Sangh, which feeds more than a hundred individuals, "Gandhiji calls it a *rasoda* (kitchen) and it sounds commonplace; the Communists would call it a 'Commune' and everybody would be impressed by it." Did not the good old knight of Addison wonder how a certain play could be a tragedy since there was not a line in it but he could understand ?

Harijan, 31-3-'46

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